THE MAGIC AND MYSTERY OF SCIENCE FICTION!

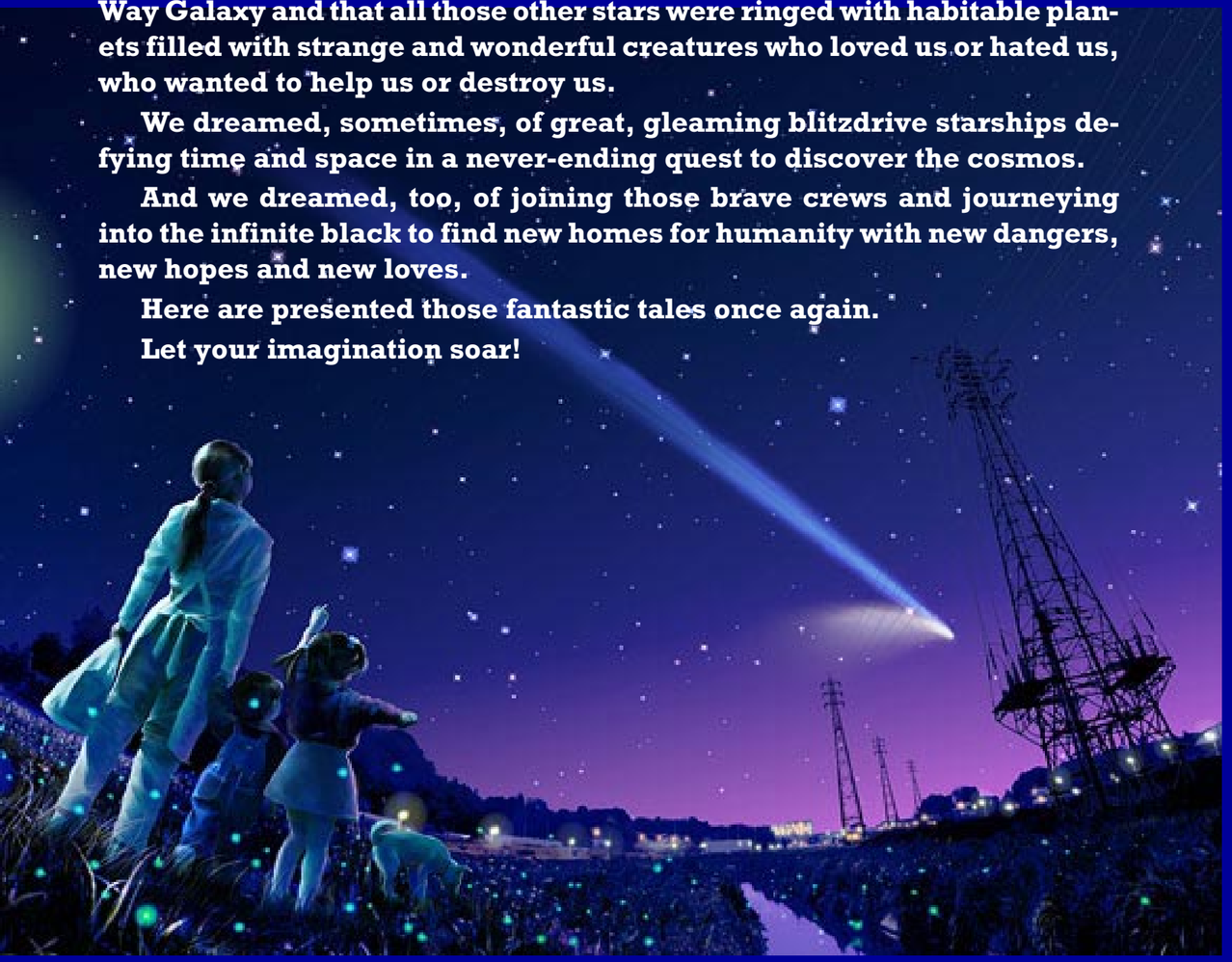
Once upon a cosmic time, when we were younger and not quite so filled with the world, we could believe that the universe was the Milky Way Galaxy and that all those other stars were ringed with habitable planets filled with strange and wonderful creatures who loved us or hated us, who wanted to help us or destroy us.

We dreamed, sometimes, of great, gleaming blitzdrive starships defying time and space in a never-ending quest to discover the cosmos.

And we dreamed, too, of joining those brave crews and journeying into the infinite black to find new homes for humanity with new dangers, new hopes and new loves.

Here are presented those fantastic tales once again.

Let your imagination soar!



Pandora
Science Fiction Science Fantasy Magazine

Pandora

40

Science Fiction Science Fantasy Magazine

IN THIS ISSUE:
The Fifth Dimension Tube
The People Of The Crater
The White Invaders

creative commons

Pandora

Science Fiction Science Fantasy Magazine

Kerson Publishing Company • 6460-65 Convoy Court • San Diego, California 92117

DISCLAIMER

creative commons

Work licensed under a Creative Commons license is governed by applicable copyright law. This allows Creative Commons licenses to be applied to all work falling under copyright, including: books, plays, movies, music, articles, photographs, blogs, and websites. Creative Commons splits these works into two categories, one of which encompasses self-published books.

This information is in the public domain and may be found in various formats on the internet and is presented here for educational and entertainment purposes.

No copyright is claimed, none is pending and none is sought.

Reasonable free use applies.

Pandora

Science Fiction Science Fantasy Magazine

Kerson Publishing Company • 6460-65 Convoy Court • San Diego, California 92117

IN THIS ISSUE

The Fifth Dimension Tube
The People Of The Crater
The White Invaders

THE FIFTH-DIMENSION TUBE

CHAPTER I. The Tube
CHAPTER II. The Death Mist
CHAPTER III. The Tree-Fern Jungle
CHAPTER IV. The Fifth-Dimension World
CHAPTER V. The Fight in the Marsh
CHAPTER VI. The Golden City
CHAPTER VII. The Fleet from Rahn
CHAPTER VIII. "Those Devils Have Got Evelyn!"
CHAPTER IX. War!
CHAPTER X. The Fight

By way of Professor Denham's Tube, Tommy and Evelyn invade the inimical Fifth-Dimensional world of golden cities and tree-fern jungles and Ragged Men.

CHAPTER I. The Tube

The generator rumbled and roared, building up to its maximum speed. The whole laboratory quivered from its vibration. The dynamo hummed and whined and the night silence outside seemed to make the noises within more deafening. Tommy Reames ran his eyes again over the power-leads to the monstrous, misshapen coils. Professor Denham bent over one of them, straightened, and nodded. Tommy Reames nodded to Evelyn, and she threw the heavy multiple-pole switch.

There was a flash of jumping current. The masses of metal on the floor seemed to leap into ungainly life. The whine of the dynamo rose to a scream and its brushes streaked blue flame. The metal things on the floor flicked together and were a tube, three feet and more in diameter. That tube writhed and twisted. It began to form itself into an awkward and seemingly impossible shape, while metal sur-

faces sliding on each other produced screams that cut through the din of the motor and dynamo. The writhing tube strained and wriggled. Then there was a queer, inaudible snap and something gave. A part of the tube quivered into nothingness. Another part hurt the eyes that looked upon it.

And then there was the smell of burned insulation and a wire was arcing somewhere, while thick rubbery smoke arose. A fuse blew out with a thunderous report, and Tommy Reames leaped to the suddenly racing motor-generator. The motor died amid gasps and rumblings. And Tommy Reames looked anxiously at the Fifth-Dimension Tube.

It was important, that Tube. Through it, Tommy Reames and Professor Denham had reason to believe they could travel to another universe, of which other men had only dreamed. And it was important in other ways, too. At the moment Evelyn Denham threw the switch, last-edition newspapers in Chicago were showing headlines about "King" Jacaro's forfeiture of two hundred thousand dollars' bail by failing to appear in court. King Jacaro was a lord of racketeerdom.

While Tommy inspected the Tube anxiously, a certain chief of police in a small town upstate was telling feverishly over the telephone of a posse having killed a monster lizard by torchlight, having discovered it in the act of devouring a cow. The lizard was eight feet high, walked on its hind legs, and had a collar of solid gold about its neck. And jewel importers, in New York, were in anxious conference about a flood of untraced jewels upon the market. Their origin was unknown. The Fifth-Dimension Tube ultimately affected all of those affairs, and the Death Mist as well. And—though it was not considered dangerous then—everybody remembers the Death Mist now.

But at the moment Professor Denham stared at the Tube concernedly, his daughter Evelyn shivered from pure excitement as she looked at it, and a redheaded man named Smithers looked impassively from the Tube to Tommy Reames and back again. He'd done most of the mechanical work on the Tube's parts, and he was as anxious as the rest. But nobody thought of the world outside the laboratory.

Professor Denham moved suddenly. He was nearest to the open end of the Tube. He sniffed curiously and seemed to listen. Within seconds the others became aware of a new smell in the laboratory. It seemed to come from the Tube itself, and it was a warm, damp smell that could only be imagined as coming from a jungle in the tropics. There were the rich odors of feverishly growing things; the heavy fragrance of unknown tropic blossoms, and a background of some curious blend of scents and smells which was alien and luring, and exotic. The whole was like the smell of another planet of the jungles of a strange world which men had never trod. And then, definitely coming out of the Tube, there was a hollow, booming noise.

* * * * *

It had been echoed and re-echoed amid the twistings of the Tube, but only an animal could have made it. It grew louder, a monstrous roar. Then yells sounded suddenly above it—human yells, wild yells, insane, half-gibbering yells of hysterical excitement and blood lust. The beast-thing bellowed and an ululating chorus of joyous screams arose. The laboratory reverberated with the thunderous noise. Then there was the sound of crashing and of paddings, and abruptly the noise was diminishing as if its source were moving farther away. The beast-thing roared and bellowed as if in agony, and the yelling noise seemed to show that men were following close upon its flanks.

Those in the laboratory seemed to awaken as if from a bad dream. Denham was kneeling before the mouth of the Tube, an automatic rifle in his hands. Tommy Reames stood grimly before Evelyn. He'd snatched up a pair of automatic pistols. Smithers clutched a spanner and watched the mouth of the Tube with a strained attention. Evelyn stood shivering behind Tommy.

Tommy said with a hint of grim humor:

"I don't think there's any doubt about the Tube having gotten through. That's the Fifth Dimension planet, all right."

He smiled at Evelyn. She was deathly pale.

"I—remember—hearing noises like that...."

Denham stood up. He painstakingly slipped on the safety of his rifle and laid it on a bench with the other guns. There was a small arsenal on a bench at one side of the laboratory. The array looked much more like arms for in expedition into dangerous territory than a normal part of apparatus for an experiment in rather abstruse mathematical physics. There were even gas masks on the bench, and some of those converted brass Very pistols now used only for discharging tear- and sternutatory-gas bombs.

"The Tube wasn't seen, anyhow," said Professor Denham briskly. "Who's going through first?"

Tommy slung a cartridge belt about his waist and a gas mask about his neck.

"I am," he said shortly. "We'll want to camouflage the mouth of the Tube. I'll watch a bit before I get out."

He crawled into the mouth of the twisted pipe.

* * * * *

The Tube was nearly three feet across, each section was five feet long, and there were gigantic solenoids at each end of each section.

It was not an experiment made at random, nor was the world to which it reached an unknown one to Tommy or to Denham. Months before, Denham had built an instrument which would bend a ray of light into the Fifth Dimension and had found

that he could fix a telescope to the device and look into a new and wholly strange cosmos.[1] He had seen tree-fern jungles and a monstrous red sun, and all the flora and fauna of a planet in the carboniferous period of development. More, by the accident of its placing he had seen the towers and the pinnacles of a city whose walls and towers seemed plated with gold.

[1] "The Fifth-Dimension Catapult"—see the January, 1931, issue of Astounding Stories.

Having gone so far, he had devised a catapult which literally flung objects to the surface of that incredible world. Insects, birds, and at last a cat had made the journey unharmed, and he had built a steel globe in which to attempt the journey in person. His daughter Evelyn had demanded to accompany him, and he believed it safe. The trip had been made in security, but return was another matter. A laboratory assistant, Von Holtz, had sent them into the Fifth Dimension, only to betray them. One King Jacaro, lord of Chicago racketeers, was convinced by him of the existence of the golden city of that other world, and that it was full of delectable loot. He offered a bribe past envy for the secret of Denham's apparatus. And Von Holtz had removed the apparatus for Denham's return before working the catapult to send him on his strange journey. He wanted to be free to sell full privileges of rapine and murder to Jacaro.

The result was unexpected. Von Holtz could not unravel the secret of the catapult he himself had operated. He could not sell the secret for which he had committed a crime. In desperation he called in Tommy Reames—rather more than an amateur in mathematical physics—showed him Evelyn and her father marooned in a tree-fern jungle, and hypocritically asked for aid.

Tommy's enthusiastic efforts soon became more than merely enthusiastic. The men of the Golden City remained invisible, but there were strange, half-mad outlaws of the jungles who hated the city. Tommy Reames had watched helplessly as they hunted for the occupants of the steel globe. He had worked frenziedly to achieve a rescue. In the course of his labor he discovered the treachery of Von Holtz as well as the secret of the catapult, and with the aid of Smithers—who had helped to build the original catapult—he made a new small device to achieve the original end.

* * * * *

The whole affair came to an end on one mad afternoon when the Ragged Men captured first an inhabitant of the Golden City, and then Denham and Evelyn in a forlorn attempt at rescue. Tommy Reames went mad. He used a tiny sub-machine gun upon the Ragged Men through the model magnetic catapult he had made, and contrived communication with Denham afterward. Instructed by Denham, he brought about the return of father and daughter to Earth just before Ragged Men and Earthling alike would have perished in a vengeful gas cloud from the Golden

City. Even then, though, his triumph was incomplete because Von Holtz had gotten word to Jacaro, and nattily-dressed gunmen raided the laboratory and made off with the model catapult, leaving three bullets in Tommy and one in Smithers as souvenirs.

Now, using the principle developed in the catapult, Tommy and Denham had built a large Tube, and as Tommy climbed along its corrugated interior he knew a good part of what he should expect at the other end. A steady current of air blew past him. It was laden with a myriad unfamiliar scents. The Tube was a tunnel from one set of dimensions to another, a permanent way from Earth to a strange, carboniferous-period planet on which a monstrous dull-red sun shone hotly. Tommy should come out into a tree-fern forest whose lush vegetation would hide the sky, and which furnished a lurking place not only for strange reptilian monsters akin to those of the long-dead past of Earth, but for the bands of ragged, half-mad human beings who were outlaws from the civilization of which Denham and Evelyn had seen proofs.

* * * * *

Tommy reached the third bend in the Tube. By now he had lost all sense of orientation. An object may be bent through one right angle only in two dimensions, and a second perfect right angle—at ninety degrees to all former paths—only in three dimensions. It follows that a third perfect right angle requires four dimensions for existence, and four perfect right angles five. The Tube bent itself through four perfect right angles, and since no human-being can ever have experience of more than three dimensions, plus time, it followed that Tommy was experiencing other dimensions than those of Earth as soon as he passed the third bend. In short, he was in another cosmos.

There was a moment of awful sickness as he passed the third bend. He was hideously dizzy when he passed the fourth. For a time he felt as if he had no weight at all. But then, quite abruptly, he was climbing vertically upward and the soughing of tree-fern fronds was loud in his ears, and suddenly the end of the Tube was under his fingers and he stared out into the world of the Fifth Dimension.

Now a gentle wind blew in his face. Tree-ferns rose to incredible heights above his head, and now and again by the movements of their fronds he caught stray glimpses of unfamiliar stars. There were red stars, and blue ones, and once he caught sight of a clearly distinguishable double star, of which each component was visible to the naked eye. And very, very far away he heard the beastly yellings he knew must be the outlaws, the Ragged Men, feasting horribly on half-scorched flesh torn from the quivering, yet-living flanks of a monstrous reptile.

Something moved, whimpered—and fled suddenly. It sounded like a human being. And Tommy Reames was struck with the utterly impossible conviction that he had heard just that sound before. It was not dangerous, in any case, and he

watched, and listened, and presently he slipped from the mouth of the Tube and by the glow of a flashlight stripped foliage from nearby growths and piled it about the Tube's mouth. And then, because the purpose of the Tube was not adventure but science, he went back down into the laboratory.

* * * * *

The three men, with Evelyn, worked until dawn at the rest of their preparations for the use of the Tube. All that time the laboratory was filled with the heavy fragrance of a tree-fern jungle upon an unknown planet. The heavy, sickly-sweet scents of closed jungle blossoms filled their nostrils. The reek of feverishly growing green things saturated the air. A steady wind blew down the Tube, and it bore innumerable unfamiliar odors into the laboratory. Once a gigantic moth bumped and blundered into the Tube, and finally crawled heavily out into the light. It was scaled, and terrible because of its monstrous size, but it had broken a wing and could not fly. So it crawled with feverish haste toward a brilliant electric light. Its eyes were especially horrible because they were not compound like the moths of Earth. They were single, like those of a man, and were fixed in an expression of utter, fascinated hypnosis. The thing looked horribly human with those eyes staring from an insect's head, and Smithers killed it in a flash of nerve-racked horror. None of them were able to go on with their work until the thing and its fascinated, staring eyes had been put out of sight. Then they labored on with the smell of the jungles of that unnamed planet thick about them, and noises now and then coming down the Tube. There were roars, and growlings, and once there was a thin high sound which seemed like the far-distant, death-startled scream of a man.

CHAPTER II. The Death Mist

Tommy Reames saw the red sun rise while he was on guard at the mouth of the Tube. The tree-ferns above him came into view as vague gray outlines. The many-colored stars grew pale. And presently a bit of crimson light peeped through the jungle somewhere. It moved along the horizon and very slowly grew higher. For a moment, Tommy saw the huge, dull-red ball that was the sun of this alien planet. Queer mosses took form and color in the daylight, displaying colors never seen on Earth. He saw flying things dart among the tree-fern fronds, and some were scaled and some were not, but none of them were feathered.

Then a tiny buzzing noise. The telephone that now rested below the lip of the Tube was being used from the laboratory.

"Smithers will relieve you," said Denham's voice in the receiver. "Come on down. We're not the only people experimenting with the Fifth Dimension. Jacaro's been working, and all hell's loose!"

Tommy slid down the Tube in an instant. The four right-angled turns made him sick and dizzy again, but he came out with his jaw set grimly. There was good

reason for Tommy's interest in Jacaro. Besides sides three bullet wounds, Tommy owed Jacaro something for stealing the first model Tube.

He emerged in the laboratory on his hands and knees as the size of the Tube made necessary. Smithers smiled placidly at him and crawled in to take his place.

"What the devil happened?" demanded Tommy.

Denham was bitter. He held a newspaper before him. Evelyn had brought coffee and the morning paper to the laboratory. She seemed rather pale.

"Jacaro's gotten through too!" snapped Denham. "He's gotten in a pack of trouble. And he's loosed the devil on Earth. Here—look!" He jabbed his finger at one headline. "And here—and here!" He thrust at others. "Here's proof."

The first headline read: "KING JACARO FORFEITS BOND." Smaller headings beneath it read: "Racketeer Missing for Income Tax Trial. $200,000 Bail Forfeited." The second headline was in smaller type: "Monster Lizard Killed! Giant Meat Eater Brought Down by Rifleman. Akin to Ancient Dinosaurs, Say Scientists."

* * * * *

"Jacaro's missing," said Denham harshly. "This article says he's vanished, and with him a dozen of his most prominent gunmen. You know he had a model catapult to duplicate—the one he got from you. Von Holtz could arrange the construction of a big Tube for him. And he knew about the Golden City. Look!"

His finger, trembling, tapped on the flashlight picture of the giant lizard of which the story told. And it was a giant. A rope had upheld a colossal, leering, reptilian head while men with rifles posed self-consciously beside the dead creature. It was as big as a horse, and at first glance its kinship to the extinct dinosaurs of Earth was plain. Huge teeth in sharklike rows. A long, trailing tail. But there was a collar about the beast-thing's neck.

"It had killed and was devouring a cow when they shot it," said Denham bitterly. "There've been reports of these creatures for days—so the news story says. They weren't printed because nobody believed them. But there are a couple of people missing. A searching party was hunting for them. They found this!"

Tommy Reames stared at the picture. His face went grimmer still. He thought of sounds he had heard beyond the Tube, not long since.

"There's no question where they came from. The Fifth Dimension. But if Jacaro brought them back, he's a fool."

"Jacaro's missing," said Denham savagely. "Don't you understand? He could get through to the Golden City. These beast-things are proof somebody did. And these things came down the Tube that somebody travelled through. Jacaro wouldn't send them, but somebody did. They've got collars around their necks! Who sent them? And why?"

* * * * *

Tommy's eyes narrowed.

"If civilized men found the mouth of a Tube, it would seem like the mouth of an artificial tunnel or a cave—"

"And if annoying vermin, like Jacaro's gunmen"—Denham's voice was brittle—"had come out of it, why, intelligent men might send something living and deadly down it, as men on Earth will send ferrets down a rat-hole! To wipe out the breed! That's what's happened! Jacaro's gone through and attacked the Golden City. They've found his Tube. And they've sent these things down...."

"If we found rats coming from a rat-hole," said Tommy very quietly, "and ferrets went down and didn't come up, we'd gas them."

"And so," Denham told him, "so would the Golden City."

He pointed to a boxed double paragraph news story under leaded twenty-point headline: "Poisonous Fog Kills Wild Life."

The story was not alarming. It said merely that state game wardens had found numerous dead game animals in a thinly-settled district near Coltsville, N.Y., and on investigation had found a bank of mist, all of half a mile across, which seemed to have caused the trouble. State chemists and biologists were investigating the phenomenon. Curiously, the bank of mist seemed not to dissipate in a normal fashion. Samples of the fog were being analyzed. It was probably akin to the Belgian fogs which on several occasions had caused much loss of life. The mist was especially interesting because in sunlight it displayed prismatic colorings. State troopers were warning the inhabitants of the neighborhood.

"The gassing's started," said Denham savagely. "I know a gas that shows rainbow colors. The Golden City uses it. So we've got to find Jacaro's Tube and seal it, or only God knows what will come out of it next. I'm going off, Tommy. You and Smithers guard our Tube. Blow it up, if necessary. It's dangerous. I'll get some authority in Albany, and we'll find Jacaro's Tube and blast it shut."

Tommy nodded, his eyes keen and thoughtful. Denham hurried out.

* * * * *

Minutes later, only, they heard the roar of a car motor going down the long lane away from the laboratory. Evelyn tried to smile at Tommy.

"It seems terrible, dangerous."

Tommy considered and shrugged.

"This news is old," he observed. "This paper was printed last night. I think I'll make a couple of long-distance calls. If the Golden City's had trouble with Jacaro, it's going to make things bad for us."

He swept his eyes about and frowningly loaded a light rifle. He put it convenient to Evelyn's hand and made for the dwelling-house and the telephone. It was odd that as he emerged into the open air, the familiar smells of Earth struck his

nostrils as strange and unaccustomed. The laboratory was redolent of the tree-fern forest into which the Tube extended. And Smithers was watching amid those dank, incredible carboniferous-period growths now.

Tommy put through calls, seeing all his and Denham's plans for a peaceful exploration party and amicable contact with the civilization of that other planet, utterly shattered by presumed outrages by Jacaro. He made call after call, and his demands for information grew more urgent as he got closer to the source of trouble. His cause for worry was verified long before he had finished. Even as he made the first call, New York newspapers had crowded a second-grade murder off their front pages to make room for the white mist upstate.

* * * * *

The early-morning editions had termed it a "poisonous fog." The breakfast editions spoke of it as a "poison fog." But it grew and moved and by the time Tommy had a clear line to get actual information about it, a tabloid had christened it the "Death Mist" and there were three chartered planes circling about it for the benefit of their newspapers. State troopers were being reinforced. At ten o'clock it was necessary to post extra traffic police to take care of the cars headed upstate to look at the mystery. At eleven it began to move! Sluggishly, to be sure, and rather raggedly, but it undoubtedly moved, and as undoubtedly it moved independently of the wind.

It was at twelve-thirty that the first casualty occurred. Before that time, the police had frantically demanded that the flood of sightseers be stopped. The Death Mist covered a square mile or more. It clung to the ground, nowhere more than fifty or sixty feet high, and glittered with all the colors of the rainbow. It moved with a velocity of anywhere from ten to twenty miles an hour. In its path were a myriad small tragedies—nesting birds stiff and still, and rabbits and other small furry bodies contorted in queer agonized postures. But until twelve-thirty no human beings were known to be its victims.

Then, though, it was moving blindly across the wind with a thin trailing edge behind it and a rolling billow of descending mist as its forefront. It rolled up to and across a concrete highway, watched by perspiring motor cops who had performed miracles in clearing a path for it among the horde of sightseeing cars. It swept on into a spindling pine wood. Behind it lay a thinning sheet of vapor—thick white mist which seemed to rise and move more swiftly to overtake the main body. It lay across the highway in a sheet which was ten feet deep, then thinned to six, to three....

* * * * *

The mist was no more than a foot thick, when a party of motorists essayed to drive through it as through a sheet of water. They dodged a swearing motorcycle cop and, yelling hilariously, plunged forward. It happened that they had not more

than a hundred yards to go, so the whole thing was plainly seen.

The car was ten yards across the sheet of mist before the effect of its motion was apparent. Then the mist, torn by the car-eddy, swirled madly in their wake. The motorists yelled delightedly. There is a picture extant, taken at just this moment. It shows the driver with a foolish grin on his face, clutching the wheel and very obviously stepping on the accelerator. A pandemonium of triumphant, hilarious shouting—and then a very sudden silence.

The car roared on. The road curved slightly. The car did not. It went off the road, turned over, and its engine shrieked itself into silence. The Death Mist went on, draining from the roadway to follow the tall, prismatically-colored cloud. It moved swiftly and blindly. To the circling planes above it, it seemed like a blind thing imagining itself confined, and searching for the edges of its prison. It gave an uncanny impression of being directed by intelligence. But the Death Mist, itself, was not alive.

Neither were the occupants of the motor car.

When Tommy got back to the laboratory after his last call for news, he found Evelyn in the act of starting to fetch him.

"Smithers called," she said uneasily. "He says something's moving about—" The buzzer of the telephone was humming stridently. Tommy answered quickly.

"Just want you handy," said Smithers' calm voice. "I might have to duck. Some Ragged Men are chasin' something. Get set, will ya?"

"Ready for anything," Tommy assured him.

Then he made it true: rifles handy, a sub-machine gun, grenades, gas masks. He handed one to Evelyn. Smithers had one already. Then Tommy waited, grimly ready by the Tube-mouth.

* * * * *

The warm, scent-laden breeze blew upon him. Straining his ears, he could hear the sound of tree-fern fronds clashing in the wind. He heard the louder sounds made by Smithers, stirring ever so slightly in the Tube. And then he caught a vague, distant uproar. It would have been faint and confused at best but the Tube was partly blocked by Smithers' body, and there were the multiple bends further to complicate the echoes. It was no more than a formless tumult through which faint yells came occasionally. It drew nearer and nearer. Tommy heard Smithers stir suddenly, almost as if he had jumped. Then there were scrapings which could only mean one thing: Smithers was climbing out of the Tube into the jungle of the Fifth-Dimension world.

The noise rose abruptly to a roar as the muffling effect of Smithers' body was removed. The yells were sharp and savage and half mad. There was a sudden crackling sound and a voice screamed:

"Gott!"

The hair rose at the back of Tommy's neck. Then there came the deafening report of an automatic pistol roaring itself empty above the end of the Tube. Smithers' voice, vastly calm:

"It's a'right, Mr. Reames. Don't worry."

A second pistol took up the fusillade. Yells and howls and screams arose. Men fled. Something came crashing to the mouth of the Tube. Smithers' voice again, with purring note in it: "Get down there. I'll hold 'em off." Then single deliberately spaced shots, while something came stumbling, fumbling, squirming down through the Tube, so filling it that Smithers' shooting was muted.

* * * * *

Then came the subtly different explosions of the Very pistols, discharging gas bombs. And Tommy drew back, his jaw set, and he stood with his weapons very ready indeed, and a scratched, bleeding, exhausted, panting, terror-stricken human being in the tattered costume of Earth crawled from the Tube and groveled on the floor before him.

Evelyn gave a little exclamation, partly of disgust and partly of horror. Because this man, who had had come from the world of the Fifth Dimension, was wholly familiar. He was tall, and he was lean, emaciated now; he wept sobbingly behind thick-lensed spectacles, and his lips were far too full and red. His name was Von Holtz; he had once been laboratory assistant to Professor Denham, and he had betrayed Evelyn and her father to the most ghastly of possible fates for a bribe offered him by Jacaro. Now he groveled. He was horrible to look at. Where he was not scratched and torn his flesh was reddened as if by fire. He was exhausted, and trembling with an awful terror, and he gasped out abject, placatory ejaculations and suddenly collapsed into a sobbing mass on the floor.

Smithers emerged from the Tube with a look of unpleasant satisfaction on his face.

"I chased off the Ragged Men with sneeze gas," he observed with a vast calmness. "They ain't comin' back for a while. An' I always wanted to break this guy's neck. I think I'll do it now."

"Not till I've questioned him," said Tommy savagely. "He and Jacaro have started hell to popping, with that Tube design they stole from me. He's got to stay alive and tell us how to stop it. Von Holtz, talk! And talk quick, or back you go through the Tube for the Ragged Men to work on!"

CHAPTER III. The Tree-Fern Jungle

Tommy watched Smithers drive away. The sun was sinking low toward the west, and the car stirred up a cloud of light-encarmined dust as it sped down the

long, narrow lane to the main road. The laboratory had intentionally been built in an isolated spot, but at the moment Tommy would have given a good deal for a few men nearby. Smithers was taking Von Holtz to Albany to add his information to Denham's pleas. Denham had ordered it, when they reached him by phone after hours of effort. Smithers had to go, to guard against Von Holtz's escape, even sick and ill as he was. And Evelyn had refused to go with him.

"If I stay in the laboratory," she insisted fiercely, "you can slip down and I can blow up the Tube after you, if the Ragged Men don't stay away. But by yourself...."

Tommy did not consent, but he was helpless. There was danger from the Tube. Not only from ghastly animals which might come through, but from men. Smithers had fought the Ragged Men above it. He had chased them off, but they would come back. Perhaps they would come very soon, perhaps not until Denham and Smithers had returned. If they could be held off, the as yet unknown dangers from the other Tube—of which only the lizards and the Death Mist were certainties—might be counteracted. In any case, the Tube must not be destroyed until its defense was hopeless.

Tommy made up a grim bundle to go through the Tube with him: the submachine gun, extra drums of shells, more gas bombs and half a dozen grenades. He hung the various objects about himself. Evelyn watched him miserably.

"You—you'll be careful, Tommy?"

"Nothing else but," said Tommy. He grinned reassuringly. "There's nothing to it, really. Just sitting still, listening. If I pop off some fireworks I'll just have to sit down and watch them run."

* * * * *

He settled his gas mask about his neck and started to enter the Tube. Evelyn touched his arm.

"I'm—frightened, Tommy."

"Shucks!" said Tommy. "Also a couple of tut-tuts." He stood up, put his arms about her, and kissed her until she smiled. "Feel better now?" he asked interestedly.

"Y-yes...."

"Fine!" said Tommy, and grinned again. "When you feel scared again, ring me on the phone and I'll give you another treatment."

But her smile faded as, beaming at her, he crawled into the first section of the Tube. And his own expression grew serious enough when she could see him no longer. The situation was not comfortable. Evelyn intended to marry him and he had to keep her cheerful, but he wished she were well away from here.

He tried to move cautiously through the Tube, but his bundles bumped and rattled. It seemed hours before he was climbing up the last section into the tree-

fern jungle. He was caution itself as he peered over the edge. It was already night upon Earth, but here the monstrous, dull-red sun was barely sinking. It moved slowly along the horizon as it dipped, but presently a gray cast come over the colorings in the forest. Flying things came clattering homeward through the masses of fern-fronds overhead. He saw a projectile-like thing with a lizard's head and jaws go darting through an incredibly small opening. It seemed to have no wings at all. But then, in one instant, a vast wing-surface flashed out, made a single gigantic flap—and the thing was a projectile again, darting through a cheraux-de-frise of interlaced fronds without a sign of wings to support it.

* * * * *

Tommy inspected his surroundings with an infinite care. As the darkness deepened he meditatively taped a flashlight below the barrel of the sub-machine gun. Turned on, it would cast a pitiless light upon his target, and the sights would be silhouetted against the thing to be killed. He hung his grenades in a handy row just inside the mouth of the Tube and set his gas bombs conveniently in place, then settled down to watch.

It was assuredly necessary. Von Holtz's story confirmed his own and Denham's guesses and made their worst fears seem optimistic. Von Holtz had made a Tube for Jacaro, working from the model of Tommy's own construction. It had been completed nearly a month before. But no jungle odors had seeped through that other Tube on its completion. It opened in a sub-cellar of a structure in the Golden City itself, the city of towers and soaring spires Denham had glimpsed long months before. By sheer fortune it opened upon a rarely used storeroom where improbable small animals—the equivalent of rats—played obscenely in the light of ever-glowing panels in the wall.

For two days of the Fifth-Dimension world Jacaro and his gunmen lay quiet. During two nights they made infinitely cautious reconnaissance. The second night it was necessary to kill two men who sighted the tiny exploring party. But the killing was done with silenced automatics, and there was no alarm. The third night they lay still, fearing an ambush. The fourth night Jacaro struck.

* * * * *

He and his men fled back to their Tube with plunder and precious gems. Their loot was vast even beyond their hopes, though they had killed other men in gathering it. The Golden City was rich beyond belief. The very crust of the Fifth-Dimension world seemed to be composed of other substances than those of Earth. The common metals of Earth were rare or even unknown. The rarer metals of Earth were the commonplace ones in the Golden City. Even the roofs seemed plated with gold, but Jacaro's gunmen saw not one particle of iron save in a ring they took from a dead man's finger. There, an acid-etched plate of steel was set as if to be used for a signet.

Von Holtz had accompanied the raiders perforce on every journey. Jeweled bearings for motors; objects of commonest use, made of gold beat thin for lightness; huge ingots of silver for industry; once a queer-shaped spool of platinum wire that it took two men to carry—these things made up the loot they scurried back to their rathole with. Five raids they made, and twenty men they shot down before they came upon disaster. On the sixth raid an outcry rose and an ambush fell upon them.

Flashes of incredibly vivid actinic flame leaped from queer engines that opened upon them. Curious small truncheonlike weapons spat paralyzing electric shocks upon them. The twelve gangsters fought with the desperation of cornered rats, with notched and explosive bullets and with streams of lead from tommy-guns.

* * * * *

A chance bullet blew something up. One of the flame weapons flew to bits, spouting what seemed to be liquid thermit upon friend and foe alike. The way of the gangsters back to their Tube was barred. The route they knew was a chaos of scorched bodies and melting metal. The thermit flowed in all directions, seeming to grow in volume as it flamed. Jacaro and his gangsters fled. They broke through the shaken remnants of the ambush. The six of them who survived the fighting found a man somnolently driving a ground vehicle with two wheels. They burst upon him and, with their scared faces constituting threats in themselves, forced him to drive them out of the Golden City. They fled along aluminum roads into the tree-fern forests, while the sky behind them seemed to flame as the city woke to the tumult in its ways.

They killed the driver of their vehicle when he refused to take them farther, and it was that murder which saved their lives. It was seen by Ragged Men, the outlaws of the jungle, and it proved their enmity to the Golden City. The Ragged Men greeted them joyously and fed them, and enlisted their aid in a savage attack on a land-convoy on the way to the city. Their weapons carried the convoy, and they watched wounded prisoners killed with excruciating tortures....

They were with the Ragged Men now, Von Holtz believed. He had fled a week or more before, when Jacaro—already learning the language of his half-mad allies—began to plan a grandiose attack upon the Golden City. Von Holtz was born a coward, and he knew where Tommy Reames and Denham would shortly thrust a Tube through. It would come out just where the catapult had flung Evelyn and Denham, months before, the same spot where he had marooned them. He searched desperately for that Tube, and failed to find it. He was chased by carnivores, scratched by thorns, and at last pursued by a yelling horde of human devils who were fired into by Smithers from the mouth of the just-finished Tube.

* * * * *

Tommy debated the story grimly as he stood guard in the Tube in the humid jungle night. Many-colored stars winked fitfully through the thatch of giant ferns overhead. The wind soughed unsteadily above the jungle. There were queer creakings, and once or twice there were distant cries, and when the wind died down there was a deep-toned croaking audible somewhere which sounded rather like the croaking of unthinkably, monstrous frogs. But it could not be that, of course. And once there was the sound of dainty movement and something passed nearby. Tommy Reames saw the shadowy outline of a bulk so vast that it turned him cold to think about it, and it did not seem fair for any creature as huge as that to move so quietly.

Then there was a little scuffling noise beneath him. A hand touched his foot.

"It's—it's me, Tommy." Evelyn crowded up beside him and whispered shakenly: "It—it was so lonesome down there, so quiet."

Tommy frowned unhappily in the darkness. If he sent her back, she would know it was because he knew danger lurked here. Then she would worry. If he did not send her back....

"I'll go back the minute you tell me," she insisted forlornly. "Honestly. But—I was lonesome."

Tommy slipped his arm about her.

"Woman," he said sternly. "I'm going to let you stay ten minutes, so you can brag to our grandchildren that you were the first Earth-girl ever to be kissed in the Fifth Dimension. But I want you down in the laboratory so you won't be in my way if I start running!"

His tone was the right one. She even laughed a little, softly, as he pressed her to him. Then she clung to his hand and tried eagerly to pierce the darkness all about them.

"You'll be able to see something presently," he assured her in a low tone. "Just keep quiet, now."

* * * * *

She gazed up at the stars, then around in the so-nearly complete obscurity. Tommy answered her comments abstractedly, after a little. He was not quite sure that certain irregular sounds, yet far distant, were not actually quite regular ones. The Ragged Men Smithers had shot into had run away. But they would come back and they might come with Jacaro and his gunmen as allies. If those distant sounds were men....

She withdrew her hand from his. Her back was toward him then, as she tried to pierce the darkness with her eyes. Tommy listened uneasily to the distant sound. Suddenly he felt Evelyn bump against his shoulder. He turned sharply—and she was out of the Tube! She was walking steadily off into the darkness!

"Evelyn! Evelyn!"

She did not falter or turn. He switched on the flashlight beneath his gun barrel and leaped out of the Tube himself. The light swept about. Evelyn's lithe figure kept moving away from him. Then his heart stood still. There were eyes beyond her in the darkness, huge, monstrous, steady eyes, half a yard apart in a head like something out of hell. And he could not fire because Evelyn was between the Thing and himself. Its eyes glowed unholily—fascinating, hypnotic, insane....

* * * * *

Evelyn swayed ... and the Thing moved! Tommy leaped like a madman shouting. As his feet struck the ground a mass of sold-seeming fungus gave way beneath him. He fell sprawling, but clutching the gun fast. The spreading beam of the flashlight showed him Evelyn turning, her face filled with a wakening horror—the horror of one released from the fascination of a snake. She screamed his name.

Then a huge lizard paw swept forward and seized her body. A second gripped her as she screamed again. And Tommy Reames was deathly, terribly cool. The whole thing had happened in seconds only. He was submerged in slimy, sticky ooze which was the crushed fungus that had tripped him. But he cleared the gun. The flashlight limned a ghastly, obscenely fat body and a long tapering tail. Tommy aimed at the base of that tail and pulled the trigger, praying frenziedly.

A stream of flame leaped from the gun-muzzle. Explosive bullets uttered their queer cracking noise. The thing screamed horribly. Its cry was hoarsely shrill. The flashlight showed it swinging ponderously about, with Evelyn held fast against its body in a fashion horribly reminiscent of a child holding a doll.

Tommy was scrambling upright. Jaws clamped, cold horror filling him, he aimed again, at the sharp-toothed head above Evelyn's body. He could not try a heart shot with her in the way. Again the gun spat out a burst of explosive lead. And Tommy should have been sickened by the effect of detonating missiles. The thing's lower jaw was shattered, half severed, made useless. It should have been killed a dozen times over.

But it screamed again until the jungle rang with the uproar, and then it fled, still screaming and still holding Evelyn clutched fast against its scaly breast.

CHAPTER IV. The Fifth-Dimension World

Tommy flung himself in pursuit, despairing. Evelyn cried out once more as the lumbering thing fled with her, giving utterance to shrieking outcries at which the tree-fern jungle shook. It leaped once, upon monstrous hind legs, but came crashing heavily to the ground. Tommy's explosive bullets had shattered the bones which supported the balancing tail. Now that huge fleshy member dragged uselessly. The thing could not progress in its normal fashion of leaps covering many

yards. It began to waddle clumsily, shrieking, with Evelyn clasped close. Its jaw was a shattered horror. It went marching insanely through the blackness of the jungle, and with it went the unholy din of its anguish, and behind it Tommy Reames came flinging himself frenziedly in pursuit.

Normally, the thing should have distanced him in seconds. Even crippled as it was, it moved swiftly. The scaly, duck-shaped head reared a good twenty feet above the fallen tree-fern fronds which carpeted the jungle. The monstrous splayed feet stretched a good yard and a half from front to rear upon the ground. Even its waddling footprints were yards apart, and it moved in terror.

Tommy tripped, fell, and got to his feet again, and the shrieking tumult was farther away. He raced madly toward the sound, the flashlight beam cutting sword-like through the blackness. He caught sight of the warty, scaly bulk of the monster at the extreme limit of the rays. It was moving faster than he could travel. He sobbed helpless curses at the thing and put forth superhuman exertions. He leaped fallen tree-fern trunks, he splashed through shallow ponds—later, when he knew something of the inhabitants of such pools, Tommy would turn cold at that memory—and raced on, gasping for breath while the shrieking of the thing that bore Evelyn grew more and more distant.

* * * * *

In five minutes he was almost strangling and the thing was half a mile ahead of him. In ten, he was exhausted, and the shrieking noise it made as it waddled away was distinctly fainter. In fifteen minutes he only heard its hooting scream between the harsh laboring rasps of his own breath as he drew it into tortured lungs. But he ran on. He leaped and climbed and ran in a terrible obliviousness to all dangers the jungle might hold.

He leaped down from one toppled tree-trunk upon what seemed be another. But the thing he landed upon gave beneath his boots in the unmistakable fashion of yielding flesh. Something vast and angry stirred and hissed furiously. Something—a head, perhaps—whipped toward him among the fallen fern-fronds. But he was racing on, sobbing, cursing, praying all at once.

Then suddenly he broke out into a profuse sweat. His breathing became easier, and then he was running lightly. His second wind had come to him. He was no longer exhausted. He felt as if he could run forever, and ran on more swiftly still. Suddenly the flashlight beam showed him a deep furrow in the rotting vegetation underfoot, and something glistened. A musky reek filled his nostrils. The thing's trail—the furrow left by its dragging tail! That musky reek was the thing's blood. It was bleeding from the wounds the explosive bullets had made. It was spouting whatever filthy fluid ran in its veins even as it waddled onward, screaming.

Five minutes more, and he felt that he was gaining on it. Then, and he was sure of it. But it was half an hour before he actually overtook the injured monster march-

ing like a mad machine. Its mutilated ducklike head held high, its colossal feet lifting one after the other in a heavy, slowing waddle, and its hoarse screams re-echoing in a senseless uproar of agony.

* * * * *

Tommy's hands were shaking, but his brain was cool with a vast coolness. He raced past the shrieking monster, and halted in its path. He saw Evelyn, a huddled bundle, clasped still to the creature's scaly breast. And Tommy sent a burst of explosive bullets into a gigantic, foot thick ankle-joint.

The monster toppled, and flung out its prehensile lizard claws in an instinctive effort to catch itself. Evelyn was thrown clear. And Tommy, standing alone in the blackness of a carboniferous jungle upon an alien planet, sent bullet after bullet into the shaking, obscenely flabby body of the thing. The bullets penetrated, and exploded. Great masses of flesh upheaved and fell away. Great gouts of awful smelling fluid were flung out and blown to mist by the explosions. The thing did not so much die as disintegrate under the storm of detonating missiles.

Then Tommy went to Evelyn. He was wild with grief. He had no faintest hope that she could still be living. But as he picked her up she moaned softly, and when he cried her name she clung to him, pressing close in an agony of thankfulness almost as devastating as her fear had been.

It was minutes before either of them could think of anything other than her safety and the fact that they were together again. But then Tommy said, in a shaken effort to be himself again:

"I—I'd have done better if—if I'd had roller skates, maybe." His grin was wholly unconvincing. "Why'd you get out of the Tube?"

"Its eyes!" Evelyn shuddered, her own eyes hidden against Tommy's shoulder. "I saw them suddenly, looking at me. And I—hadn't any will. I felt myself getting out of the Tube and walking toward it. It was like the way a snake fascinates—hypnotizes—a bird...."

A vagrant wind-eddy submerged them in the foul reek of the dead thing's flesh. Tommy stirred.

"Ugh! Let's get out of this. There'll be things coming to feed on that carcass. They'll smell it."

Evelyn tried to stand, and succeeded. She clung to his hand.

"Do you think you can find the Tube again?"

Tommy was already thinking of that. He grimaced.

"Probably. Back-trail the damned thing. If the flashlight battery holds out. Its tail left plenty of sign for us to follow."

* * * * *

They started. And Evelyn had literally been forgotten in its agony by the mon-

ster which had carried her. Its body, though scaled and warty, was flabby and soft. Pressed against its breast she had been half strangled, but had no injuries beyond huge, purple bruises which had not yet reached the point of stiffness. She followed Tommy gamely, and the need for action kept her from yielding to the reaction from her terror.

For a long, long time they back-trailed. Less than fifteen minutes after leaving the carcass of the thing Tommy had killed, they heard beast-roarings and the sound of fighting. But that noise died away as they traveled. Presently they reached the spot where Tommy had leaped upon a huge living thing. It was gone now, but the impress of a body the thickness of a barrel remained upon the rotted vegetation of the jungle floor. Evelyn shivered when Tommy pointed it out.

"It was large," said Tommy ruefully. "I didn't even get a good look it the thing. Probably just as well, though. I might have been—er—delayed. Good Lord! What's that?"

A light had sprung into being somewhere. It was bright. It was blinding in its brilliance. Coming through the tangled jungle growth, it seemed as if spears of flame shot through the air, irradiating stray patches of scabrous tree-trunk with unbearable light. For an instant the illumination held. Then there was a distant, cracking detonation. The unmistakable explosion of gun-cotton split the air, and its echoes rolled and reverberated through the jungle. The light went out. Then came a thin, high yelling sound which, faint as it was, had something of the quality of hysterical glee. That crazy ululation kept up for several minutes. Evelyn shivered.

"The Ragged Men," said Tommy very quietly. "They sneaked up on the Tube. They flung blazing thermit, or something like it, with a weapon captured from the Golden City. That explosion was the grenades going off. I'm afraid the Tube's blown up, Evelyn."

She caught her breath, looking mutely up at him.

"Here's a pistol," he said briefly, "and shells. There's no use our going to the Tube to-night. It would be dangerous. We'll do our investigating at dawn."

* * * * *

He found a crevice where tree-fern trunks grew close together and closed in three sides of a sort of roofless cave. He seated himself grimly at the opening to wait for daybreak. He was not easy in his mind. There had been two Tubes to the Fifth-Dimension world. One had been made by Jacaro for his gunmen. That was now held by the men of the Golden City, as was proved by carnivorous lizards and the Death Mist that had come down it. The other was now blown up or, worse, in the hands of the Ragged Men. In any case Tommy and Evelyn were isolated upon a strange planet in a strange universe. To fall into the hands of the Ragged Men was to die horribly, and the Golden City would not now welcome inhabitants

of the world Jacaro and his men had come from. To the civilized men of this world, Jacaro's raids would seem invasion. They would seem acts of war on the part of the people of Earth. And the people of Earth, all of them, would seem enemies. Jacaro would never be identified as an unauthorized invader. He would seem to be a scout, an advance guard, a spy, for hordes of other invaders yet to come.

As the long night wore away, Tommy's grim hopelessness intensified. The Ragged Men would hunt them for sport and out of hatred for all sane human beings. The men of the Golden City would be merciless to compatriots of Jacaro's gunmen. And Tommy had Evelyn to look out for.

* * * * *

When dawn came, his face was drawn and lined. Evelyn woke with a little gasp, staring affrightedly about her. Then she tried gamely to smile.

"Morning, Tommy," she said shakily. She added in a brave attempt at levity: "Where do we go from here?"

"We look at the Tube," said Tommy heavily. "There's a bare chance...."

He led the way as on the night before, with his gun held ready. They traveled for half an hour through the awakening jungle. Then for long, long minutes Tommy searched for a sign of living men before he ventured forth to look at the wreckage of the Tube. He found no live men, and only two dead ones. But a glimpse of their bestial, vice-ridden faces was enough to remove any regret for their deaths.

The Tube was shattered. Its mouth was belled out and broken by the explosion of the grenades hung within it. A part of the metal was molten—from the thermit, past question. There was a veritable crater fifteen feet across where the Tube had come through, and there were only shattered shreds of metal where the first bend had been. Tommy regarded the wreckage grimly. A pair of oxidized copper wires, their insulation burnt off, stung his eyes as he traced them to where they vanished in torn-up earth. He took them in his bare hands. The tingling sting of a low-voltage current made his heart leap. Then he smiled grimly. He touched them to each other. Dot-dot-dot—dash-dash-dash—dot-dot-dot. S O S! If there was anybody in the laboratory, that would tell them.

His hands stung sharply. Someone was there, ringing the phone! Evelyn came toward him, her face resolutely cheerful.

"No hope, Tommy?" she asked. "I just saw the telephone, all battered up. I guess we're pretty badly off."

"Get it!" said Tommy feverishly. "For Heaven's sake, get it! The phone wires weren't broken. If we can make it work...."

* * * * *

The instrument was a wreck. It was crumpled and torn and apparently useless. The diaphragm of the receiver was punctured. The transmitter seemed to

have been crushed. But Tommy worked desperately over them, and twisted the earth-wires into place.

"Hello, hello, hello!"

The voice that answered was Smithers', strained and fearful:

"Mr. Reames! Thank Gawd! What's happened? Is Miss Evelyn all right?"

"So far," said Tommy. "Listen!" He told curtly just what had happened. "Now, what's happened on Earth?"

"Hell!" panted Smithers bitterly. "Hell's been poppin'! The Death Mist's two miles across an' still growin an' movin'. Four townships under martial law an' movin' out the people. It got thirty of 'em this morning. An' they think the professor's crazy an' nobody'll listen to him!"

"Damn!" said Tommy. He considered, grimly. "Look here, Von Holtz ought to convince them."

"He caved in, outa his head, before I got to Albany. He's in hospital now, ravin'. He's got some kinda fever the doctors don't know nothin' about. Sick as hell!"

Tommy compressed his lips. Matters were more desperate even than he had believed. He informed his helper measuredly:

"Evelyn and I can't stay around here, Smithers. The Ragged Men may come back, and it'll be weeks before you and the professor can get another Tube through. I'm going to make for the Golden City and work on them there to cut off the Death Mist."

There was an inarticulate sound from Smithers.

"Tell the professor. If he can find Jacaro's Tube, he'll work out some way to communicate through it. We've got to stop that Death Mist somehow. And we don't know what else they may try."

Smithers tried to speak, and could not. He merely made grief-stricken noises. He worshiped Evelyn and she was isolated in a hostile world which was vastly more unreachable than could be measured by millions or trillions of miles. But at last he said unsteadily:

"We'll be comin', Mr. Reames. We'll come, if we have t' blow half the world apart!"

Tommy said grimly: "Then hunt up the Golden City and bring extra ammunition. Mostly explosive bullets. Good-by."

* * * * *

He untwisted the wires from the shattered phone units and thrust them in his pocket. Evelyn was picking up stray small objects from the ground.

"I've found some cartridges, Tommy," she said constrainedly, "and a pistol I think will work."

"Then listen for visitors," commanded Tommy, "while I look for more."

For half in hour he scoured the area around the shattered Tube. He found where some clumsy-wheeled thing had been pushed to a spot near the Tube—undoubtedly the machine which had sprayed the flaming stuff upon it. He found two pockets full of shells. He found an extra magazine, for the sub-machine gun. It was nearly full and only a little bent. That was all.

"Now," he said briskly, "we'll start. I've got a hunch the jungle thins out over that way. We'll find a clearing, try to locate the Golden City either by seeing it or by watching for aircraft flying to it, and then make for it. They're making war on Earth there. They don't understand. We've got to make them understand. O. K.?"

Evelyn nodded. She put out her hand suddenly, a brave slender figure amid the incredible growths about her.

"I'm glad, Tommy," she said slowly, "that if—if anything happens, it will be the—the two of us. Funny, isn't it?"

Tommy kissed the twisted little smile from her face.

"And now that that's over," he observed, ashamed of his own emotion, "let's go!"

* * * * *

They went. Tommy watched the sun and kept approximately a straight line. They traveled three miles, and the jungle broke abruptly. Before them was a spongy surface neither solid earth or marsh. It shelved gently down to a vast and steaming morass upon which the dull-red sun shone hotly. It was vast, that marsh, and a steaming haze hung over it, and it seemed to reach to the world's end. But vaguely, through the attenuating upper layers of the steamy haze, they saw the outlines of a city beyond: tall towers and soaring spires, buildings of a grace and perfection of outline unknown upon the Earth. And faint golden flashes came from the walls and pinnacles of that city. They were reflections of this planet's monster sun, upon walls and roofs of plated gold.

"The Golden City," said Tommy heavily. He looked at the horrible marsh between. His heart sank.

And then there was a sudden screaming ululation nearby. A half-naked man was running out of sight. Two others danced and capered and yelled in insane glee, pointing at Tommy and at Evelyn. The running man's outcry was echoed from far away. Then it was taken up and repeated here and there in the jungle.

"They saw our tracks near the Tube," snapped Tommy bitterly. "Oh, what a fool I am! Now they'll ring us in."

He seized Evelyn's hand and began to run. There was a little rise in the ground a hundred yards away, with a clump of leafy ferns to shade it. They reached it as other half-naked, wholly mad human forms burst out of the jungle to yell and caper and make derisive and horrible gestures at the fugitives.

"Here we fight," said Tommy grimly. "The ground's open, anyhow. We fight here, and very probably we die here. But first...."

He knelt down and drew the finest of fine beads upon a bearded man who carried a glittering truncheonlike club which, by the way it was carried, was more than merely a bludgeon. He pulled the trigger for a single shot.

The bullet struck the capering Ragged Man fairly in the chest. And it exploded.

CHAPTER V. The Fight in the Marsh

Twice, within the next two hours, the Ragged Men mustered the courage to charge. They came racing across the semi-solid ooze like the madmen they were. Their yells and shouts were maniacal howls of blood-lust or worse. And twice Tommy broke their rush with a savage ruthlessness. The sub-machine-gun's first magazine was nearly empty. It was an unhandy weapon for single-shot work but it was loaded with explosive shells. The second rush he stopped with an automatic pistol. There were half-naked bodies partly buried in the ooze all the way from the jungle's edge to within ten yards of the hillock on which he and Evelyn had taken refuge.

It was hot there, terribly hot. The air was stifling. It fairly reeked of moisture and the smells from the swamp behind them were sickening. Tommy began to transfer the shells from the spare bent magazine to the one he had carried with the gun.

"We've a couple of reasons to be thankful," he observed. "One is that there's a bit of shade overhead. The other is that we had the big magazines for this gun. We still have nearly ninety shells, besides the ones for the pistols."

Evelyn said soberly:

"We're going to be killed, don't you think, Tommy?"

Tommy frowned.

"I'm rather afraid we are," he said irritably. "Confound it, and I'd thought of such excellent arguments to use in the City back yonder! Smithers said the Death Mist was two miles across, to-day, and still growing. The people in the city are still pouring the stuff down through Jacaro's Tube."

Evelyn smiled faintly. She touched his hand.

"Trying to keep me from worrying? Tommy...." She hesitated until he growled a question. "Please—remember that when Daddy and I were in the jungle before, we saw what these Ragged Men do to prisoners they take. I just want you to promise that—well, you won't wait too long, in hopes of somehow saving me."

Tommy stared at her. Then he decisively reached forward and put his hand over her mouth.

"Keep quiet," he said gently. "They shan't capture you. I promise that. Now

keep quiet."

* * * * *

There was only silence for a long time. Now and again a hidden figure screamed in rage at them. Now and again some flapping thing sped toward the jungle's edge. Once a naked arm thrust one of the golden truncheons from behind its cover, pointing at a flying thing a few yards overhead. The flying thing suddenly toppled, turning over and over before it crashed to the ground. There were howls of glee.

"They seem mad," said Tommy meditatively, "and they act like lunatics, but I've got a hunch of some sort about them. But what?"

Sunlight gleamed on something golden beyond the jungle's edge. Naked figures went running to the spot. An exultant tumult arose.

"Now they try another trick," Tommy observed dispassionately. "I remember that at the Tube they had pushed something on wheels...."

The sub-machine gun was unhandy for accurate single shots, and no pistol can be used to effect at long ranges. To conserve ammunition, Tommy had been shooting only at relatively close targets, allowing the Ragged Men immunity at over two hundred yards. But now he flung over the continuous-fire stud. He watched grimly.

The foliage at the edge of the jungle parted. A crude wagon appeared. Its axles were lesser tree-trunks. Its wheels were clumsy and crude beyond belief. But mounted upon it there was a queer mass of golden metal which looked strangely beautiful and strangely deadly.

"That's the thing," said Tommy dispassionately, "which made the flare of light last night. It blew up the Tube. And Von Holtz told me—hm—his friends, in the City...."

He sighted carefully. The wagon and its contents were surrounded by a leaping, capering mob. They shook their fists in an insane hatred.

A storm of bullets burst upon them. Tommy was traversing the little gun with the trigger pressed down. His lips were set tightly. And suddenly it seemed as if the solid earth burst asunder! There had been an instant in which the bullet-bursts were visible. They tore and shattered the howling mob of Ragged Men. But then they struck the golden weapon. A sheet of blue-white flame leaped skyward and round about. A blast of blistering, horrible heat smote upon the beleaguered pair. The moisture of the ooze between them and the jungle flashed into steam. A section of the jungle itself, a hundred yards across, shriveled and died.

* * * * *

Steam shot upward in a monstrous cloud—miles high, it seemed. Then, almost instantly, there was nothing left of the Ragged Men about the golden weapon, or of the weapon itself, but an unbearable blue-white light which poured away and

trickled here and there and seemed to grow in volume as it flamed.

From the rest of the jungle a howl arose. It was a howl of such loss, and of such unspeakable rage, that the hair at the back of Tommy's neck lifted, as a dog's hackles lift at sight of an enemy.

"Keep your head down, Evelyn," said Tommy composedly. "I have an idea that the burning stuff gives off a lot of ultra-violet. Von Holtz was badly burned, you remember."

Naked figures flashed forward from the jungle beyond the burned area. Tommy shot them down grimly. He discarded the sub-machine gun with its explosive shells for the automatics. Some of his targets were only wounded. Those wounded men dragged themselves forward, screaming their rage. Tommy felt sickened, as if he were shooting down madmen. A voice roared a rage-thickened order from the jungle. The assault slackened.

Five minutes later it began again, and this time the attackers waded out into the softer ooze and flung themselves down, and then began a half-swimming, half-crawling progress behind bits of tree-fern stump, or merely pushing walls of the jellylike mud before them. The white light expanded and grew huge—but it dulled as it expanded, and presently seemed no hotter than molten steel, and later still it was no more than a dull-red heat, and later yet....

Tommy shot savagely. Some of the Ragged Men died. More did not.

"I'm afraid," he said coolly, "they're going to get us. It seems rather purposeless, but I'm afraid they're going to win."

Evelyn thrust a shaking hand skyward. "There, Tommy!"

* * * * *

A strange, angular flying thing was moving steadily across the marsh, barely above the steamlike haze that hung in thinning layers about its foulness. The flying thing moved with a machinelike steadiness, and the sun twinkled upon something bright and shining before it.

"A flying machine," said Tommy shortly. His mind leaped ahead and his lips parted in a mirthless smile. "Get your gas mask ready, Evelyn. The explosion of that thermit-thrower made them curious in the City. They sent a ship to see."

The flying thing grew closer, grew distinct. A wail arose from the Ragged Men. Some of them leaped to their feet and fled. A man came out into the open and shook his fists at the angular thing in the air. He screamed at it, and such ghastly hatred was in the sound that Evelyn shuddered.

Tommy could see it plainly, now. Its single wing was thick and queerly unlike the air-foils of Earth. A framework hung below it, but it had no balancing tail. And there was a glittering something before it that obviously was its propelling mechanism, but as obviously was not a screw propeller. It swept overhead, with a man in

it looking downward. Tommy watched coolly. It was past him, sweeping toward the jungle. It swung sharply to the right, banking steeply. Smoking things dropped from it, which expanded into columns of swiftly-descending vapor. They reached the jungle and blotted it out. The flying machine swung again and swept back to the left. More smoking things dropped. Ragged Men erupted from the jungle's edge in screaming groups, only to writhe and fall and lie still. But a group of five of them sped toward Tommy, shrieking their rage upon him as the cause of disaster. Tommy held his fire, looking upward. A hundred yards, fifty yards, twenty-five....

* * * * *

The flying machine soared in easy, effortless circles. The man in it was watching, making no effort to interfere.

Tommy shot down the five men, one after the other, with a curiously detached feeling that their vice-brutalized faces would haunt him forever. Then he stood up.

The flying machine banked, turned, and swept toward him, and a smoking thing dropped toward the earth. It was a gas bomb like those that had wiped out the Ragged Men. It would strike not ten yards away.

"Your mask!" snapped Tommy.

He helped Evelyn adjust it. The billowing white cloud rolled around him. He held his breath, clapped on his mask, exhaled until his lungs ached, and was breathing comfortably. The mask was effective protection. And then he held Evelyn comfortably close.

For what seemed a long, long while they were surrounded by the white mist. The cloud was so dense, indeed, that the light about them faded to a gray twilight. But gradually, bit by bit, the mist grew thinner. Then it moved aside. It drifted before the wind toward the tree-fern forest and was lost to sight.

The flying machine was circling and soaring silently overhead. As the mist drew aside, the pilot dived down and down. And Tommy emptied his automatic at the glittering thing which drew it. There was a crashing bolt of blue light. The machine canted, spun about with one wing almost vertical, that wing-tip struck the marsh, and it settled with a monstrous splashing of mud. All was still.

Tommy reloaded, watching it keenly.

"The framework isn't smashed up, anyhow," he observed grimly. "The pilot thinks we're some of Jacaro's gang. My guns were proof, to him. So, since the Ragged Men didn't get us, he gassed us." He watched again, his eyes narrow. The pilot was utterly still. "He may be knocked out. I hope so! I'm going to see."

* * * * *

Automatic held ready, Tommy moved toward the crashed machine. It had splashed into the ooze less than a hundred yards away. Tommy moved cautiously.

Twenty yards away, the pilot moved feebly. He had knocked his head against some part of his machine. A moment later he opened his eyes and stared about. The next instant he had seen Tommy and moved convulsively. A glittering thing appeared in his hand—and Tommy fired. The glittering thing flew to one side and the pilot clapped his hand to a punctured forearm. He went white, but his jaw set. He stared at Tommy, waiting for death.

"For the love of Pete," said Tommy irritably, "I'm not going to kill you! You tried to kill me, and it was very annoying, but I have some things I want to tell you."

He stopped and felt foolish because his words were, of course, unintelligible. The pilot was staring amazedly at him. Tommy's tone had been irritated, certainly, but there was neither hatred nor triumph in it. He waved his hand.

"Come on and I'll bandage you up and see if we can make you understand a few things."

Evelyn came running through the muck.

"He didn't hurt you, Tommy?" she gasped. "I saw you shoot—"

The pilot fairly jumped. At first glance he had recognized her as a woman. Tommy growled that he'd had to "shoot the damn fool through the arm." The pilot spoke, curiously. Evelyn looked at his arm and exclaimed. He was holding it above the wound to stop the bleeding. Evelyn looked about helplessly for something with which to bandage it.

"Make pads with your handkerchief," grunted Tommy. "Take my tie to hold them in place."

The prisoner looked curiously from one to the other. His color was returning. As Evelyn worked on his arm he seemed to grow excited at some inner thought. He spoke again, and looked at once puzzled and confirmed in some conviction when they were unable to comprehend. When Evelyn finished her first-aid task he smiled suddenly, flashing white teeth at them. He even made a little speech which was humorously apologetic, to judge by its tone. When they turned to go back to their fortress he went with them without a trace of hesitation.

"Now what?" asked Evelyn.

"They'll be looking for him in a little while," said Tommy curtly. "If we can convince him we're not enemies, he'll keep them from giving us more gas."

* * * * *

The pilot was fumbling at a belt about the curious tunic he wore. Tommy watched him warily. But a pad of what seemed to be black metal came out, with a silvery-white stylus attached to it. The pilot sat down the instant they stopped and began to draw in white lines on the black surface. He drew a picture of a man and an angular flying machine, and then a sketchy, impressionistic outline of a city's

towers. He drew a circle to enclose all three drawings and indicated himself, the machine, and the distant city. Tommy nodded comprehension as the pilot looked up. Then came a picture of a half-naked man shaking his fists at the three encircled sketches. The half-naked man stood beneath a roughly indicated tree-fern.

"Clever," said Tommy, as a larger circle enclosed that with the city and the machine. "He's identifying himself, and saying the Ragged Men are enemies of himself and his Golden City, too. That much is not hard to get."

He nodded vigorously as the pilot looked up again. And then he watched as a lively, tiny sketch grew on the black slab, showing half a dozen men, garbed almost as Tommy was, using weapons which could only be sub-machine guns and automatic pistols. They were obviously Jacaro's gangsters. The pilot handed over the plate and watched absorbedly as Tommy fumbled with the stylus. He drew, not well but well enough, an outline of the towers of New York. The difference in architecture was striking. There followed tiny figures of himself and Evelyn—with a drily murmured, "This isn't a flattering portrait of you, Evelyn!"—and a circle enclosing them with the towers of New York.

The pilot nodded in his turn. And then Tommy encircled the previously drawn figures of the gangsters with New York, just as the Ragged Men had been linked with the other city. And a second circle linked gangsters and Ragged Men together.

* * * * *

"I'm saying," observed Tommy, "that Jacaro and his mob are the Ragged Men of our world, which may not be wrong, at that."

There was no question but that the pilot took his meaning. He grinned in a friendly fashion, and winced as his wounded arm hurt him. Ruefully, he looked down at his bandage. Then he pressed a tiny stud at the top of the black-metal pad and all the white lines vanished instantly. He drew a new circle, with tree-ferns scattered about its upper third—a tiny sketch of a city's towers. He pointed to that and to the city visible through the mist—a second city, and a third, in other places. He waved his hand vaguely about, then impatiently scribbled over the middle third of the circle and handed it back to Tommy.

Tommy grinned ruefully.

"A map," he said amusedly. "He's pointed out his own city and a couple of others, and he wants us to tell him where we come from. Evelyn—er—how are we going to explain a trip through five dimensions in a sketch?"

Evelyn shook her head. But a shadow passed over their heads. The pilot leaped to his feet and shouted. There were three planes soaring above them, and the pilot in the first was in the act of releasing a smoking object over the side. At the grounded pilot's shout, he flung his ship into a frantic dive, while behind him the

smoking thing billowed out a thicker and thicker cloud. His plane was nearly hidden by the vapor when he released it. It fell two hundred yards and more away, and the white mist spread and spread. But it fell short of the little hillock.

* * * * *

"Quick thinking," said Tommy coolly. "He thought we had this man a prisoner, and he'd be better off dead. But—"

Their captive was shouting again. His head thrown back, he called sentence after sentence aloft while the three ships soared back and forth above their heads, soundless as bats. One of the three rose steeply and soared away toward the city. Their captive, grinning, turned and nodded his head satisfiedly. Then he sat down to wait.

Twenty minutes later a monstrous machine with ungainly flapping wings came heavily over the swamp. It checked and settled with a terrific flapping and an even more terrific din. Half a dozen armed men waited warily for the three to approach. The golden weapons lifted alertly as they drew near. The wounded man explained at some length. His explanation was dismissed brusquely. A man advanced and held out his hands for Tommy's weapons.

"I don't like it," growled Tommy, "but we've got to think of Earth. If you get a chance hide your gun, Evelyn."

He pushed on the safety catches and passed over his guns. The pilot he had shot down led them onto the fenced-in deck of the monstrous ornithopter. Machinery roared. The wings began to beat. They were nearly invisible from the speed of their flapping when the ship lifted vertically from the ground. It rose straight up for fifty feet, the motion of the wings changed subtly, and it swept forward.

It swung in a vast half circle and headed back across the marsh for the Golden City. Five minutes of noisy flight during which the machine flapped its way higher and higher above the marsh—which seemed more noisome and horrible still from above—and then the golden towers of the city were below. Strange and tapering and beautiful, they were. No single line was perfectly straight, nor was any form ungraceful. These towers sprang upward in clean-soaring curves toward the sky. Bridges between them were gossamerlike things that seemed lace spun out in metal. And as Tommy looked keenly and saw the jungle crowding close against the city's metal walls, the flapping of the ornithopter's wings changed again and it seemed to plunge downward like a stone toward a narrow landing place amid the great city's towering buildings.

CHAPTER VI. The Golden City

The thing that struck Tommy first of all was the scarcity of men in the city, compared to its size. The next thing was the entire absence of women. The roar of

machines smote upon his consciousness as a bad third, though they made din enough. Perhaps he ignored the machine noises because the ornithopter on which they had arrived made such a racket itself.

They landed on a paved space perhaps a hundred yards by two hundred, three sides of which were walled off by soaring towers. The fourth gave off on empty space, and he realized that he was still at least a hundred feet above the ground. The ornithopter landed with a certain skilful precision and its wings ceased to beat. Behind it, the two fixed-wing machines soared down, leveled, hovered, and settled upon amazingly inadequate wheels. Their pilots got out and began to push them toward one side of the landing area. Tommy noticed it, of course. He was noticing everything, just now. He said amazedly:

"Evelyn! They launch these planes with catapults like those our battleships use! They don't take off under their own power!"

The six men on the ornithopter put their shoulders to their machine and trundled it out of the way. Tommy blinked at the sight.

"No field attendants!" He gazed out across the open portion of the land area and saw an elevated thoroughfare below. Some sort of vehicle, gleaming like gold, moved swiftly on two wheels. There was a walkway in the center of the street with room for a multitude. But only two men were in sight upon it. "Lord!" said Tommy. "Where are the people?"

There was brief talk among the crew of the ornithopter. Two of them picked up Tommy's weapons, and the pilot he had wounded made a gesture indicating that he should follow. He led the way to an arched door in the nearest tower. A little two-wheeled car was waiting. They got into it and the pilot fumbled with the controls. As he worked at it—rather clumsily on account of his arm—the rest of the ornithopter's crew came in. They wheeled out another vehicle, climbed into it, and shot away down a sloping passage.

* * * * *

Their own vehicle followed and emerged upon the paved and nearly empty thoroughfare. Tall buildings rose all about them, with curved walls soaring dizzily skyward. There was every sign of a populous city, including the dull drumming roar of many machines, but the streets were empty. The little machine moved swiftly for minutes. Twice it swung aside and entered a sloping incline. Once it went up. The other time it dived down seventy feet on a four-hundred-foot ramp. Then it swung sharply to the right, meandered into a street-level way leading into the heart of a monster building, and stopped. And in all its travel it had not passed fifty people.

The pilot-turned-chauffeur turned and grinned amiably, and led the way again. Steps—twenty or thirty of them. Then they emerged suddenly into a vast room. It must have been a hundred and fifty feet long, fifty wide, and nearly as high. It was

floored with alternate blocks of what seemed to be an iron-hard black wood and the omnipresent golden metal. Columns and pilasters about the place gave forth the same subdued deep golden glow. Light streamed from panels inset in the wall and ceiling—a curious saffron-red light. There was a massive table of the hard black wood. Chairs with curiously designed backs were ranged about it. They were benches, really, but they served the purpose of chairs. Each was too narrow to hold more than one person. The room was empty.

They waited. After a long time a man in a blue tunic came into the room and sat down on one of the benches. A long time later, another man came in, in red; and another and another, until there were a dozen in all. They regarded Tommy and Evelyn with a weary suspicion. One of them—an old man with a white beard—asked questions. The pilot answered them. At a word, the two men with Tommy's weapons placed them on the table. They were inspected casually, as familiar things. They probably were, since some of Jacaro's gunmen had been killed in a fight in this city. Another question.

The pilot explained briefly and offered Tommy the black-metal pad again. It still contained the incomplete map of a hemisphere, and was obviously a repetition of the question of where he came from.

* * * * *

Tommy took it, frowning thoughtfully. Then an idea struck him. He found the little stud which, pressed by the pad's owner, had erased the previous drawings. He pressed it and the lines disappeared. And Tommy drew, crudely enough, that complicated diagram which is supposed to represent a cube which is a cube in four dimensions: a tesseract. Upon one surface of the cube he indicated the curving towers of the Golden City. Upon a surface representing a plane beyond the three dimensions of normal experience, he repeated the angular tower structures of New York. He shrugged rather hopelessly as he passed it over, but to his amazement it was understood at once.

The little black pad passed from hand to hand and an animated discussion took place. One rather hard-faced man was the most animated of all. The bearded old man demurred. The hard-faced man insisted. Tommy could see that his pilot's expression was becoming uneasy. But then a compromise seemed to be arrived at. The bearded man spoke a single, ceremonial phrase and the twelve men rose. They moved toward various doors and one by one left, until the room was empty.

But the pilot looked relieved. He grinned cheerfully at Tommy and led the way back to the two-wheeled vehicle. The two men with Tommy's weapons vanished. And again there was a swift, cyclonelike passage along empty ways with the throbbing of machinery audible everywhere. Into the base of a second building, up endless stairs, past innumerable doors. It seemed to Tommy that he heard voices behind some of them, and they were women's voices.

At a private, triple knock a door opened wide, and the pilot led the way into a room, closed and locked the door behind him, and called. A woman's voice cried out in astonishment. Through an inner arch a woman came running eagerly. Her face went blank at sight of Tommy and Evelyn, and her hand flew to a tiny golden object at her waist. Then, at the pilot's chuckle, she flushed vividly.

* * * * *

Hours later, Tommy and Evelyn were able to talk it over. They were alone then, and could look out an oval window upon the Golden City all about them. It was dark, but saffron-red panels glowed in building walls all along the thoroughfares, and tiny glowing dots in the soaring spires of gold told of people within other dwellings like this.

"As I see it," said Tommy restlessly, "the Council—and it must have been that in the big room to-day—put us in our friend's hands to learn the language. He's been working with me four hours, drawing pictures, and I've been writing down words I've learned. I must have several hundred of them. But we do our best talking with pictures. And Evelyn, this city's in a bad fix."

Evelyn said irrelevantly: "Her name is Ahnya, Tommy, and she's a dear. We got along beautifully. I'll bet I found out things you don't even guess at."

"You probably have," admitted Tommy, frowning. "Check up on this: our friend's name is Aten, and he's an air-pilot and also has something to do with growing foodstuffs in some special towers where they grow crops by artificial light only. Some of the plants he sketched look amazingly like wheat, by the way. The name of the town is"—he looked at his notes—"Yugna. There are some other towns, ten or twelve of them. Rahn is the nearest, and it's worse off than this one."

"Of course," said Evelyn, smiling. "They use cuyal openly, there!"

"How'd you learn all that?" demanded Tommy.

"Ahnya told me. We made gestures and smiled at each other. We understood perfectly. She's crazy about her husband, and I—well she knows I'm going to marry you, so...."

Tommy grunted.

"I suppose she explained with a smile and gestures just how much of a strain it is, simply keeping the city going?"

"Of course," said Evelyn calmly. "The city's fighting against the jungle, which grows worse all the time. They used to grow their foodstuffs in the open fields. Then within the city. Now they use empty towers and artificial light. I don't know why."

* * * * *

Tommy grunted again.

"This planet's just had, or is having, a change of geologic period," he ex-

plained, frowning. "The plants people need to live on aren't adapted to the new climate and new plants fit for food are scarce. They have to grow food under shelter, now, and their machines take an abnormal amount of supervision—I don't know why. The air-conditions for the food plants; the machines that fight back the jungle creepers which thrive in the new climate and try to crawl into the city to smother it; the power machines; the clothing machines—a million machines have to be kept going to keep back the jungle and fight off starvation and just hold on doggedly to the bare fact of civilization. And they're short-handed. The law of diminishing returns seems to operate. They're trying to maintain a civilization higher than their environment will support. They work until they're ready to drop, just to stay in the same place. And the monotony and the strain makes some of them take to cuyal for relief."

He surveyed the city from the oval window, frowning in thought.

"It's a drug which grows wild," he added slowly. "It peps them up. It makes the monotony and the weariness bearable. And then, suddenly, they break. They hate the machines and the city and everything they ever knew or did. It's a sort of delayed-action psychosis which goes off with a bang. Some of them go amuck in the city, using their belt-weapons until they're killed. More of them bolt for the jungle. The city loses better than one per cent of its population a year to the jungle. And then they're Ragged Men, half mad at all times and wholly mad as far as the city and its machines are concerned."

Evelyn linked her arm in his.

"Somehow," she told him, smiling, "I think one Thomas Reames is working out ways and means to help a city named Yugna."

"Not yet," said Tommy grimly. "We have to think of Earth. Not everybody in the Council approved of us. Aten told me one chap argued that we ought to be shoved out into the jungle again as compatriots of Jacaro. And the machines were especially short-handed to-day because of a diversion of labor to get ready something monstrous and really deadly to send down the Tube to Earth. We've got to find out what that is, and stop it."

* * * * *

But on the second day afterward, when he and Evelyn were summoned before the Council again, he still had not found out. During those two days he learned many other things, to be sure: that Aten for instance, was relieved from duty at the machines only because he was wounded; that the power of the main machines came from a deep bore which brought up superheated steam from the source of boiling springs long since built over; that iron was a rare metal, and consequently there was no dynamo in the city and magnetism was practically an unknown force; that electrokinetics was a laboratory puzzle—or had been, when there was leisure for research—while the science of electrostatics had progressed far past its

state on Earth. The little truncheonlike weapons carried a stored-up static charge measurable only in hundreds of thousands of volts, which could be released in flashes which were effective up to a hundred feet or more.

And he learned that the thermit-throwers actually spat out in normal operation tiny droplets of matter Aten could not describe clearly, but which seemed to be radioactive with a period of five minutes or less; that in Rahn, the nearest other city, cuyal was taken openly, and the jungle was growing into the town with no one to hold it back; that two generations since there had been twenty cities like this one, but that a bare dozen still survived; that there was a tradition that human beings had come upon this planet from another world where other human beings had harried them, and that in that other world there were divers races of humanity, of different colors, whereas in the world of the Golden City all mankind was one race; that Tommy's declaration that he came from another group of dimensions had been debated and, on re-examination of Jacaro's Tube, accepted, and that there was keen argument going on as to the measures to be taken concerning it.

* * * * *

These things Tommy had learned, and he and Evelyn went to their second interrogation by the city's Council armed with written vocabularies of nearly a thousand words, which they had sorted out and made ready for use. But they were still ignorant of the weapons the Golden City might use against Earth.

The Council meeting took place in the same hall, with its alternating black-and-gold flooring and the saffron-red lighting panels casting a soft light everywhere. This was a scheduled meeting, foreseen and arranged for. The twelve chairs above the heavy table were all occupied from the first. But Tommy realized that the table had been intended to seat a large number of councilors. There were guards stationed formally behind the chairs. There were spectators, auditors of the deliberations of the Council. They were dressed in a myriad colors, and they talked quietly among themselves; but it seemed to Tommy that nowhere had he seen weariness, as an ingrained expression, upon so many faces.

Tommy and Evelyn were led to the foot of the Council table. The bearded old man in blue began the questioning. As Keeper of Foodstuffs—according to Aten—he was a sort of presiding officer.

Tommy answered the questions crisply. He had known what they would be, and he had developed a vocabulary to answer them. He told them of Earth, of Professor Denham, of his and the professor's experiments. He outlined the first experiment with the Fifth-Dimension catapult and the result of it—when the Golden City had sent the Death Mist to wipe out a band of Ragged Men who had captured a citizen, and after him Evelyn and her father.

* * * * *

This they remembered. Nods went around the table. Tommy told them of Jacaro, stressing the fact that Jacaro was an outlaw, a criminal upon Earth. He explained the theft of the model Tube, and how it was that their first contact with Earth had been with the dregs of Earth humanity. On behalf of his countrymen he offered reparation for all the damage Jacaro and his men had done. He proposed a peaceful commerce between worlds, to the infinite benefit of both.

There was silence until he finished. The faces before him were immobile. But a hawk-faced man in brown asked dry questions. Were there more races than one upon Earth? Were they of diverse colors? Did they ever war among themselves? At Tommy's answers the atmosphere seemed to change. And the hawk-faced man rose to speak.

Tommy and Evelyn, he conceded caustically, had certainly come from another world. Their own most ancient legends described just such a world as his: a world of many races of many colors, who fought many wars among themselves. Their ancestors had fled from such a world, according to legend through a twisting cavern which they had sealed behind them. The conditions Tommy described had been the cause of their ancestors' flight. They, the people of Yugna, would do well to follow the example of their forebears: strip these Earth folk of their weapons, exile them to the jungles, destroy the Tube through which the Mist of Many Colors had been sent. All should be as in past ages.

* * * * *

Tommy opened his mouth to answer, but another man sprang to his feet. His face alone was not weary and worn. As he stood up, Aten murmured "Cuyal!" and Tommy understood that this man used the drug which was destroying the city's citizens, but gave a transient energy to its victims. He spoke in fiery phrases, urging action which would be drastic and certain. He spoke confidently, persuasively. There was a rustling among those who watched and listened to the debate. He had caught at their imagination.

Evelyn, exerting every faculty to understand, saw Tommy's lips set grimly.

"What—what is it?" she whispered. "I—I don't understand...."

Tommy spoke in a savage growl.

"He says," he told her bitterly, "that in one blow they can defeat both the jungle and the invaders from Earth. In past ages their ancestors were faced by enemies they could not defeat. They fled to this world. Now they are faced by jungles they cannot defeat. He proposes that they flee to our world. The Death Mist is a toy, he reminds them, compared with gases they know. There is a gas of which one part in ten hundred million is fatal! In a hundred of their days they can make and send through the Tube enough of it to kill every living thing on Earth. They've figures on the Earth's size and atmosphere from me, damn 'em! And he reminds them that that deadly gas changes of itself into a harmless substance. He urges them to gas

Earth humanity out of existence, call upon the other cities of this world, and presently move through the Tube to Earth. They'll carry their food-plants, rebuild their cities, and abandon this planet to the jungles and the Ragged Men. And the hell of it is, they can do it!"

A sudden approving buzz went through the Council hall.

CHAPTER VII. The Fleet from Rahn

The approval of the citizens of Yugna was not enthusiastic. It was desperate. Their faces were weary. Their lives were warped. They had been fighting since birth against the encroachment of the jungle, which until the days of their grandparents had been no menace at all. But for two generations these people had been foredoomed, and they knew it. Nearly half the cities of their race were overwhelmed and their inhabitants reduced to savage hunters in the victorious jungles. Now the people of Yugna saw a chance to escape from the jungle. They were offered rest. Peace. Relaxation from the desperate need to serve insatiable machines. Sheer desperation impelled them. In their situation, the people of Earth would annihilate a solar system for relief, let alone the inhabitants of a single planet.

Shouts began to be heard above the uproar in the Council hall—approving shouts, demands that one be appointed to conduct the operation which was to give them a new planet on which to live, where their food-plants would thrive in the open, where jungles would no longer press on them.

Tommy's face went savage and desperate, itself. He clenched and unclenched his hands, struggling among his meagre supply of words for promises of help from Earth, which promises would tip the scales for peace again. He raised his voice in a shout for attention. He was unheard. The Council hall was in an uproar of desperate approval. The orator stood flushed and triumphant. The Council members looked from eye to eye, and slowly the old, white-bearded Keeper of Foodstuffs placed a golden box upon the table. He touched it in a certain fashion, and handed it to the next man. That second man touched it, and passed it to a third. And that man....

* * * * *

A hush fell instantly. Tommy understood. The measure was being decided by solemn vote. The voting device had reached the fifth man when there was a frantic clatter of footsteps, a door burst in, and babbling men stood in the opening, white-faced and stammering and overwhelmed, but trying to make a report.

Consternation reigned, incredulous, amazed consternation. The bearded old man rose dazedly and strode from the hall with the rest of the Council following him. A pause of stunned stupefaction, and the spectators in the hall rushed for other doors.

"Stick to Aten," snapped Tommy. "Something's broken, and it has to be our

way. Let's see what it is."

He clung alike to Evelyn and to Aten as the air-pilot fought to clear a way. The doors were jammed. It was minutes before they could make their way through and plunge up the interminable steps Aten mounted, only to fling himself out to the open air. Then they were upon a flying bridge between two of the towers of the city. All about the city human figures were massing, staring upward.

And above the city swirled a swarm of aircraft. Tommy counted three of the clumsy ornithopters, high and motelike. There were twenty or thirty of the small, one-man craft. There were a dozen or more two-man planes. And there were at least forty giant single-wing ships which looked as if they had been made for carrying freight. They soared and circled above the city in soundless confusion. Before each of them glittered something silvery, like glass, which was not a screw propeller but somehow drew them on.

The Council was massed two hundred yards away. A single-seater dived downward, soared and circled noiselessly fifty yards overhead, and its pilot shouted a message. Then he climbed swiftly and rejoined his fellows. The men about Tommy looked stunned, as if they could not believe their ears. Aten seemed stricken beyond the passability of reaction.

* * * * *

"I got part of it," snapped Tommy, to Evelyn's whispered question. "I think I know the rest. Aten!" He snapped question after question in his inadequate phrasing of the city's tongue. Evelyn saw Aten answer dully, then bitterly, and then, as Tommy caught his arm and whispered savagely to him, Aten's eyes caught fire. He nodded violently and turned on his heel.

"Come on!" And Tommy seized Evelyn's arm again.

They followed closely as Aten wormed his way through the crowd. They raced behind him downstairs and through a door into a dusty and unvisited room. It was a museum. Aten pointed grimly.

Here were the automatic pistols taken from those of Jacaro's men who had been killed, a nasty sub-machine gun which had been Tommy's, and grenades—Jacaro's. Tommy checked shell calibres and carried off a ninety-shot magazine full of explosive bullets, and a repeating rifle.

"I can do more accurate work with this than the machine gun," he said cryptically. "Let's go!"

It was not until they were racing away from the Council building in one of the two-wheeled vehicles that Evelyn spoke again.

"I—understand part," she said unsteadily. "Those planes overhead are from Rahn. And they're threatening—"

"Blackmail," said Tommy between clenched teeth. "It sounds like a perfectly

normal Earth racket. A fleet from Rahn is over Yugna, loaded with the Death Mist. Yugna pays food and goods and women or it's wiped out by gas. Further, it surrenders its aircraft to make further collections easier. Rahn refuses to die, though it's let in the jungle. It's turned pirate stronghold. Fed and clothed by a few other cities like this one, it should be able to hold out. It's a racket, Evelyn. A stick-up. A hijacking of a civilised city. Sounds like Jacaro."

* * * * *

The little vehicle darted madly through empty highways, passing groups of men staring dazedly upward at the soaring motes overhead. It darted down this inclined way, up that one. It shot into a building and around a winding ramp. It stopped with a jerk and Aten was climbing out. He ran through a doorway, Tommy and Evelyn following. Planes of all sizes, still and lifeless, filled a vast hall. And Aten struggled with a door mechanism and a monster valve swung wide. Then Tommy threw his weight with Aten's to roll out the plane he had selected. It was a small, triangular ship, with seats for three, but it was heavy. The two men moved it with desperate exertion. Aten pointed, panting, to slide-rail and it took them five minutes to get the plane about that rail and engage a curious contrivance in a slot in the ship's fuselage.

"Tommy," said Evelyn, "you're not going to—"

"Run away? Hardly!" said Tommy. "We're going up. I'm going to fight the fleet with bullets. They don't have missile-weapons here, and Aten will know the range of their electric-charge outfits."

"I'm coming too," said Evelyn desperately.

Tommy hesitated, then agreed.

"If we fail they'll gas the city anyway. One way or the other...."

There was a sudden rumble as Evelyn took her place. The plane shot forward with a swift smooth acceleration. There was no sound of any motor. There was no movement of the glittering thing at the forepart of the plane. But the ship reached the end of the slide and lifted, and then was in mid-air, fifty feet above the vehicular way, a hundred feet above the ground.

* * * * *

Tommy spoke urgently. Aten nodded. The ship had started to climb. He leveled it out and darted straight forward. He swung madly to dodge a soaring tower. He swept upward a little to avoid a flying bridge. The ship was travelling with an enormous speed, and the golden walls of the city flashed past below them and they sped away across feathery jungle.

"If we climbed at once," observed Tommy shortly, "they'd think we meant to fight. They might start their gassing. As it is, we look like we're running away."

Evelyn said nothing. For five miles the plane fled as if in panic. Evelyn clung to

the filigree side of the cockpit. The city dwindled behind them. Then Aten climbed steeply. Tommy was looking keenly at the glittering thing which propelled the ship. It seemed like a crystal gridwork, like angular lace contrived of glass. But a cold blue flame burned in it and Tommy was obscurely reminded of a neon tube, though the color was wholly unlike. A blast of air poured back through the grid. Somehow, by some development of electro-statics, the "static jet" which is merely a toy in Earth laboratories had become usable as a means of propelling aircraft.

Back they swept toward the Golden City, five thousand feet or more aloft. The ground was partly obscured by the hazy, humid atmosphere, but glinting sun-reflections from the city guided them. Soaring things took shape before them and grew swiftly nearer. Tommy spoke again, busily loading the automatic rifle with explosive shells.

Aten swung to follow a vast dark shape in its circular soaring, a hundred feet above it and a hundred yards behind. Wind whistled, rising to a shriek. Tommy fired painstakingly.

* * * * *

The other plane zoomed suddenly as a flash of blue flame spouted before it. It dived, then, fluttering and swooping, began to drift helplessly toward the spires of the city below it.

"Good!" snapped Tommy. "Another one, Aten."

Aten made no reply. He flung his ship sidewise and dived steeply before a monstrous freight carrier. Tommy fired deliberately as they swept past. The propelling grid flashed blue flame in a vast, crashing flame. It, too, began to flutter down.

Tommy did not miss until the fifth time, and Aten turned with a grimace of disappointment. Tommy's second shot burst in a freight compartment and a man screamed. His voice carried horribly in the silence of these heights. But Tommy shot again, and, again, and there was a satisfying blue flash as a fifth big ship went fluttering helplessly down.

Aten began to circle for height Tommy refilled the magazine.

"I'm bringing 'em down," he explained unnecessarily to Evelyn, "by smashing their propellers. They have to land, and when they land they're hostages—I hope!"

Confusion became apparent among the hostile planes. The one Yugna ship was identified as the source of disaster. Tommy worked his rifle in cold fury. He aimed at no man, but the propelling grids were large. For a one-man ship they were five feet in diameter, and for the big freight ships, they were circles fifteen feet across. They were perfect targets, and Aten seemed to grasp the necessary tactics almost instantly. Dead ahead or from straight astern, Tommy could not miss a shot. The fleet of Rahn went fluttering downward. Fifteen of the biggest were

down, and six of the two-man planes. A sixteenth and seventeenth flashed at their bows and drifted helplessly....

* * * * *

Then the one-man ships attacked. Six of them at once. Aten grinned and dived for all of them. One by one, Tommy smashed their crystal grids and watched them sinking unsteadily toward the towers of the city. As his own ship drove over them, little golden flashes licked out. Electric-charge weapons. One flash struck the wingtip of their plane, and flame burst out, but Aten flung the ship into a mad whirl in which the blaze was blown out.

Another freight ship helpless—and another. Then the air fleet of Rahn turned and fled. The ornithopters winged away in heavy, creaking terror. The others dived for speed and flattened out hardly above the tree-fern jungle. They streaked away in ignominious panic. Aten darted and circled above them and, as Tommy failed to fire, turned and went racing back toward the city.

"After the first ones went down," observed Tommy, "they knew that if they gassed the city we'd shoot them down into their own gas cloud. So they ran away. I hope this gives us a pull."

The city's towers loomed before them. The lacy bridges swarmed with human figures. Somewhere a fight was in progress about a grounded plane from Rahn. Others seemed to have surrendered sullenly on alighting. For the first time Tommy saw the city as a thronging mass of humanity, and for the first time he realized how terrible must be the strain upon the city if with so large a population so few could be free for leisure in normal times.

The little plane settled down and landed lightly. There were a dozen men on the landing platform now, and they were herding disarmed men from Rahn away from a big ship Tommy had brought down. Tommy looked curiously at the prisoners. They seemed freer than the inhabitants of Yugna. Their faces showed no such signs of strain. But they did not seem well-fed, nor did they appear as capable or as resolute.

"Cuyal," said Aten in an explanatory tone, seeing Tommy's expression. He put his shoulder to the big ship, to wheel it back into its shed.

"You son of a gun," grunted Tommy, "it's all in the day's work to you, fighting an invading fleet!"

A messenger came panting through the doorway. Tommy grinned.

"The Council wants us, Evelyn. Now maybe they'll listen."

* * * * *

The atmosphere of the resumed Council meeting was, as a matter of fact, considerably changed. The white-bearded Keeper of Foodstuffs thanked them with dignity. He invited Tommy to offer advice, since his services had proved so use-

ful.

"Advice?" said Tommy, in the halting, fumbling phrases he had slaved to acquire. "I would put the prisoners from Rahn to work at the machines, releasing citizens." There was a buzz of approval, and he added drily in English: "I'm playing politics, Evelyn." Again in the speech of Yugna he added: "And I would have the fleet of Yugna soar above Rahn, not to demand tribute as that city did, but to disable all its aircraft, so that such piracy as to-day may not be tried again!" There was a second buzz of approval. "And third," said Tommy earnestly, "I would communicate with Earth, rather than assassinate it. I would require the science of Earth for the benefit of this world, rather than use the science of this world to annihilate that! I—"

For the second time the Council meeting was interrupted. An armed messenger came pounding into the room. He reported swiftly. Tommy grasped Evelyn's wrist in what was almost a painful grip.

"Noises in the Tube!" he told her sharply. "Earth-folk doing something in the Tube Jacaro came through. Your father...."

There was an alert silence in the Council hall. The white-bearded old man had listened to the messenger. Now he asked a grim question of Tommy.

"They may be my friends, or your enemies," said Tommy briefly. "Mass thermit-throwers and let me find out!"

* * * * *

It was the only possible thing to do. Tommy and Evelyn went with the Council, in a body, in a huge wheeled vehicle that raced across the city. Lingering groups still searched the sky above them, now blessedly empty again. But the Council's vehicle dived down and down to ground level, where the rumble of machines was loud indeed, and then turned into a tunnel which went down still farther. There was feverish activity ahead, where it stopped, and a golden thermit-thrower came into sight upon a dull-colored truck.

Questions. Feverish replies. The white-bearded man touched Tommy on the shoulder, regarding him with a peculiarly noncommittal gaze, and pointed to a doorway that someone was just opening. The door swung wide. There was a confusion of prismatically-colored mist within it, and Tommy noticed that tanks upon tanks were massed outside the metal wall of that compartment, and seemingly had been pouring something into the room.

The mist drew back from the door. Saffron-red lighting panels appeared dimly, then grew distinct. There were small, collapsed bundles of fur upon the floor of the storeroom being exposed to view. They were, probably, the equivalent of rats. And then the last remnant of mist vanished with a curiously wraithlike abruptness, and the end of Jacaro's Tube came into view.

Tommy advanced, Evelyn clinging to his sleeve. There were clanking noises

audible in this room even above the dull rumble of the city's machines. The noises came from the Tube's mouth. It was four feet and more across, and it projected at a crazy angle out of a previously solid wall.

"Hello!" shouted Tommy. "Down the Tube!"

* * * * *

The clattering noise stopped, then continued at a faster rate.

"The gas is cut off!" shouted Tommy again. "Who's there?"

A voice gasped from the Tube's depths:

"It's him!" The tone was made metallic by echoing and reechoing in the bends of the Tube, but it was Smithers. "We're comin', Mr. Reames."

"Is—is Daddy there?" called Evelyn eagerly. "Daddy!"

"Coming," said a grim voice.

The clattering grew nearer. A goggled, gas-masked head appeared, and a body followed it out of the Tube, laden with a multitude of burdens. A second climbed still more heavily after the first. The brightly-colored citizens of the Golden City reached quietly to the weapons at their waists. A third voice came up the Tube, distant and nearly unintelligible. It roared a question.

Smithers ripped off his gas mask and said distinctly:

"Sure we're through. Go ahead. An' go to hell!"

Then there was a thunderous detonation somewhere down in the Tube's depths. The visible part of it jerked spasmodically and cracked across. A wisp of brownish smoke puffed out of it, and the stinging reek of high explosive tainted the air. Then Evelyn was clinging close to her father, and he was patting her comfortingly, and Smithers was pumping both of Tommy's hands, his normal calmness torn from him for once. But after a bare moment he had gripped himself again. He unloaded an impressive number of parcels from about his person. Then he regarded the citizens of the Golden City with an impersonal, estimating gaze, ignoring twenty weapons trained upon him.

"Those damn fools back on Earth," he observed impassively, "decided the professor an' me was better off of it. So they let us come through the Tube before they blew it up. We brought the explosive bullets, Mr. Reames. I hope we brought enough."

And Tommy grinned elatedly as Denham turned to crush his hands in his own.

CHAPTER VIII. "Those Devils Have Got Evelyn!"

That night the three of them talked, on a high terrace with most of the Golden City spread out below them. Over their heads, lights of many colors moved and shifted slowly in the sky. There were a myriad glowing specks of saffron-red about the ways of the city, and the air was full of fragrant odors. The breath of the jungle

reached them even a thousand feet above ground. And the dull, persistent roar of the machines reached them too. There were five people on the terrace: Tommy, Denham, Smithers, Aten and the white-bearded old Keeper of Foodstuffs. He looked on as the Earthmen talked.

"We're marooned," Tommy was saying crisply, "and for the time being we've got to throw in with these people. I believe they came from Earth originally. Four, five thousand years ago, perhaps. Their tale is of a cave they sealed up behind them. It might have been a primitive Tube, if such a thing can be imagined."

Denham filled his pipe and lighted it meditatively.

"Half the American Indian tribes," he observed drily, "had legends of coming originally from an underworld. I wonder if Tubes are less your own invention than we thought?"

Tommy shrugged.

"In any case, Earth is safe."

"Is it?" insisted Denham. "You say they understood at once when you talked of dimension-travel. Ask the old chap there."

* * * * *

Tommy frowned, then labored with the question. The bearded old man spoke gravely. At his answer, Tommy grimaced.

"Datl's gone looking for the cave their legends tell of," he said reluctantly. "He's the lad who wanted the city to gas Earth with some ghastly stuff they know of, and move over when the gas was harmless again. But the cave has been lost for centuries, and it's in the torrid zone—which is torrid! We're near the North Pole of this planet, and it's tropic here. It must be mighty hot at the equator. Datl took a ship and supplies and sailed off. He may be killed. In any case it'll be some time before he's dangerous. Meanwhile, as I said, we're marooned."

"And more," said Denham deliberately. "By the time the authorities halfway believed me, and Von Holtz could talk, there were more deaths from the Death Mist. It wiped out a village, clean. So when it was realized that I'd caused it—or that was their interpretation—and was the only man who could cause it again, why, the authorities thought it a splendid idea for me to come through the Tube. They invited me to commit suicide. My knowledge was too dangerous for a man to have. So," he added grimly, "I have committed suicide. We will not be welcomed back on Earth, Tommy."

Tommy made an impatient gesture.

"Worry about that later," he said impatiently. "Right now there's a war on. Rahn's desperate, and the prisoners we took this morning say Jacaro and his gunmen are there, advising them. Ragged Men have joined in to help kill civilized humans. And they've still got aircraft."

"Which can still bombard this city," observed Denham. "Can't they?"

Tommy pointed to the many-colored beams of light playing through the sky overhead.

"No. Those lights were invented to guide night-flying planes back home. They're static lights—cold lights, by the way—and they register powerfully when a static-discharge propeller comes within range of them. If Rahn tries a night attack, Aten and I take off and shoot them down again. That's that. But we've got to design gas masks for these people, and I think I can persuade the Council to send over and take all Rahn's aircraft away to-morrow. But the real emergency is the jungle."

* * * * *

He expounded the situation of the city as he understood it. He labored painstakingly to make his meaning clear while Denham blew meditative smoke rings and Smithers listened quietly. But when Tommy had finished, Smithers said in a vast calm:

"Say, Mr. Reames, y'know I asked you to get somebody to take me through some o' these engine rooms. That's kinda my specialty. An' these folks are good, no question! There's engines—even steam engines—we couldn't build on Earth. But, my Gawd, they're dumb! There ain't a piece of automatic machinery on the place. There's one man to every motor, handlin' the controls or the throttle. They got stuff we couldn't come near, but they never thought of a steam governor."

Tommy turned kindling eyes upon him. "Go on!"

"Hell," said Smithers, "gimme some tools an' I'll go through one shop an' cut the workin' force in half, just slammin' governors, reducin' valves, an' automatic cut-offs on the machines I understand!"

Tommy jumped to his feet. He paced up and down, then halted and began to spout at Aten and the Keeper of Foodstuffs. He gesticulated, fumbling for words, and hunted absurdly for the ones he wanted among his written lists, and finally was drawing excitedly on Aten's black-metal tablet. Smithers got up and looked over his shoulder.

"That ain't it, Mr. Reames," he said slowly. "Maybe I...."

* * * * *

Tommy pressed the stud that erased the page. Smithers took the tablet and began to draw painstakingly. Aten, watching, exclaimed suddenly. Smithers was drawing an actual machine, actually used in the Golden City, and he was making a working sketch of a governor so that it would operate without supervision while the steam pressure continued. Aten began to talk excitedly. The Keeper of Foodstuffs took the tablet and examined it. He looked blank, then amazed, and as the utterly foreign idea of a machine which controlled itself struck home, his hands shook and color deepened in his cheeks.

He gave an order to Aten, who dashed away. In ten minutes other men began to arrive. They bent over the drawing. Excited comments, discussions and disputes began. A dawning enthusiasm manifested itself. Two of them approached Smithers respectfully, with shining eyes. They drew their tablets from their belts, rather skilfully drew the governor he had indicated in larger scale, and by gestures asked for more detailed plans. Smithers stood up to go with them.

"You're a hero, now, Smithers," Tommy informed him exultantly. "They'll work you to death and call you blessed!"

"Yes, sir," said Smithers. "These fellas are right good mechanics. They just happened to miss this trick." He paused. "Uh—where's Miss Evelyn?"

"With Aten's—wife," said Tommy. This was no time to discuss the marital system of Yugna. "We were prisoners until this morning. Now we're guests of honor. Evelyn's talking to a lot of women and trying to boost our prestige."

* * * * *

Smithers went over to the gesticulating group of draftsmen. He settled down to explain by drawings, since he had not a word of their language. In a few minutes a group went rushing away with the sketch tablets held jealously to their breasts, bound for workshops. Other men appeared to present new problems. A wave of sheer enthusiasm was in being. A new idea which would lessen the demands of the machines was a godsend to these folk.

Then Denham blew a smoke ring and said meditatively:

"I think I've got something too, Tommy. Ultra-sonic vibrations. Sound waves at two to three hundred thousand per second. Air won't carry them. Liquids will. They use 'em to sterilize milk, killing the germs by sound waves carried through the fluid. I think we can start some ultra-sonic generators out there that will go through the wet soil and kill all vegetation within a given range. We might clear away the jungle for half a mile or so and then use ultra-sonic beams to help it clear while new food-plants are tried out."

Tommy's eyes glowed.

"You've given yourself a job! We'll turn this planet upside down."

"We'll have to," said Denham drily. "This city may believe in you, but there are others, and these folk are a little too clever. There's no reason why some other city shouldn't attack Earth, if they seriously attack the problem of building a Tube."

Tommy ground his teeth, frowning. Then he started up. There was a new noise down in the city. A sudden flare of intolerable illumination broke out. There was an explosion, many screams, then the yelling tumult of men in deadly battle.

* * * * *

Every man on the tower terrace was facing toward the noise, staring. The white-bearded man gave an order, deliberately. Men rushed. But as they swarmed to-

ward an exit, a green beam of light appeared near the uproar. It streaked upward, wavering from side to side and making the golden walls visible in a ghostly fashion. It shivered in a hasty rhythm.

Aten groaned, almost sobbed. There was another flash of that unbearable actinic flame. A thermit-thrower was in action. Then a third flash. This was farther away. The tumult died suddenly, but the green light-beam continued its motion.

Tommy was snapping questions. Aten spoke, and choked upon his words. Tommy swore in a sudden raging passion and then turned a chalky face toward the other two men from Earth.

"The prisoners!" he said in a hoarse voice. "The men from Rahn! They broke loose. They rushed an arsenal. With hand weapons and a thermit-thrower they fought their way to a place where the big vehicles are kept. They raided a dwelling-tower on the way and seized women. They've gone off on the metal roads through the jungle!" He tried to ease his collar. Aten, still watching the green beam, croaked another sentence. "Those devils have got Evelyn!" cried Tommy hoarsely. "My God! Aten's wife, and his...." He jerked a hand toward the Councilor. "Fifty women—gone through the jungle with them, toward Rahn! Those devils have got Evelyn!"

He whirled upon Aten, seizing his shoulder, shaking the man as he roared questions.

"No chance of catching them." Far away, in the jungle, the infinitely vivid actinic flame blazed for several seconds. "They've sprayed thermit on the road. It's melted and ruined. It'd take hours to haul the ground vehicles past the gap. They're got arms and lights. They can fight off the beasts and Ragged Men. They'll make Rahn. And then"—he shook with the rage that possessed him—"Jacaro's there with those gunmen of his and his friends the Ragged Men!"

* * * * *

He seemed to control himself with a terrific effort. He turned to the white-bearded Councilor, whose bearing was that of a man stunned by disaster. Tommy spoke measuredly, choosing words with a painstaking care, clipping the words crisply as he spoke.

The Councilor stiffened. Old as he was, an undeniable fighting light came into his eyes. He barked orders right and left. Men woke from the paralysis of shock and fled upon errands of his command. And Tommy turned to Denham and Smithers.

"The women will be safe until dawn," he said evenly. "Our late prisoners can't lose the way—aluminum roads that are no longer much used lead between all the cities—but they won't dare stop in the jungles. They'll go straight on through. They should reach Rahn at dawn or a little before. And at dawn our air fleet will be over the city and they'll give back the women, unharmed, or we'll turn their own

trick on them, by God! It'd be better for Evelyn to die of gas than as—as the Ragged Men would kill her!"

His hands were clenched and he breathed noisily for an instant. Then he swallowed, and went on in the same unnatural calm:

"Smithers, you're going to stay behind, with part of the air fleet. You'll get aloft before dawn and shoot down any strange aircraft. They might try to stalemate us by repeating their threat, with our guns over Rahn. I'll give orders."

He turned again to the Councilor, who nodded, glanced at Smithers, and repeated the command.

"You, sir," he spoke to Denham, "you'll come with me. It's your right, I suppose. And we'll go down and get ready."

He led the way steadily toward a door. But he reached up to his collar, once, as if he were choking, and ripped away collar and coat and all, unconscious of the resistance of the cloth.

* * * * *

That night the Golden City made savage preparation for war. Ships were loaded and ranged in order. Crews armed themselves, and helped in the loading and arming of other ships. Oddly enough, it was to Tommy that men came to ask if the directing apparatus for the Death Mist should be carried. The Death Mist could, of course, be used as a gas alone, drifting with the wind, or it could be directed from a distance. This had been done on Earth, with the directional impulses sent blindly down the Tube merely to keep the Mist moving always. The controlling apparatus could be carried in a monster freight plane. Tommy ordered it done. Also he had the captured planes from Rahn refitted for flight by replacing their smashed propelling grids. Fresh crews of men for these ships organized themselves.

When the fleet took off there was only darkness in all the world. The unfamiliar stars above shone bright and very near as Tommy's ship, leading, winged noiselessly up and down and straight away from the play of prismatic lights above the city. Behind him, silhouetted against that many-colored glow, were the angular shapes of many other noiseless shadows. The ornithopters with their racket would start later, so the planes would be soaring above Rahn before their presence was even suspected. The rest of the fleet flew in darkness.

* * * * *

The flight above the jungle would have been awe-inspiring at another time. There were the stars above, nearer and brighter than those of Earth. There was no Milky Way in the firmament of this universe. The stars were separate and fewer in number. There was no moon. And below there was only utter, unrelieved darkness, from which now and again beast-sounds arose. They were clearly audible on board the silent air fleet. Roarings, bellowings, and hoarse screamings. Once the ships passed above a tumult as of unthinkable monsters in deadly battle, when

for an instant the very clashing of monstrous jaws was audible and a hissing sound which seemed filled with deadly hate.

Then lights—few of them, and dim ones. Then blazing fires—Ragged Men, camped without the walls of Rahn or in some gold-walled courtyard where the jungle thrust greedy, invading green tentacles. The air fleet circled noiselessly in a huge batlike cloud. Then things came racing from the darkness, down below, and there was a tumult and a shouting, and presently the hilarious, insanely gleeful uproar of the Ragged Men. Tommy's face went gray. These were the escaped prisoners, arrived actually after the air fleet which was to demand the return of their captives.

Tommy wet his lips and spoke grimly to his pilot. There were six men and many Death-Mist bombs in his ship. He was asking if communication could be had with the other ships. It was wise to let Rahn know at once that avengers lurked overhead for the captives just delivered there.

For answer, a green signal-beam shot out. It wavered here and there. Tommy commanded again. And as the signal-beam flickered, he somehow sensed the obedience of the invisible ships about him. They were sweeping off to right and left. Bombs of the Death Mist were dropping in the darkness. Even in the starlight, Tommy could see great walls of pale vapor building themselves up above the jungle. And a sudden confused noise of yapping defiance and raging hatred came up from the city of Rahn. But before dawn came there was no other sign that their presence was known.

* * * * *

The ornithopters came squeaking and rattling in their heavy flight just as the dull-red sun of this world peered above the horizon. The tree-fern fronds waved languidly in the morning breeze. The walls and towers of Rahn gleamed bright gold, in parts, and in parts they seemed dull and scabrous with some creeping fungus stuff, and on one side of the city the wall was overwhelmed by a triumphant tide of green. There the jungle had crawled over the ramparts and surged into the city. Three of the towers had their bases in the welter of growing things, and creepers had climbed incredibly and were still climbing to enter and then destroy the man-made structures.

But about the city there now reared a new rampart, rising above the tree-fern tops: there was a wall of the Death Mist encompassing the city. No living thing could enter or leave the city without passing through that cloud. And at Tommy's order it moved forward to the very encampments of the Ragged Men.

He spoke, beginning his ultimatum. But a movement below checked him. On a landing stage that was spotted with molds and lichens, women were being herded into clear view. They were the women of the Golden City. Tommy saw a tiny figure in khaki—Evelyn! Then there was a sudden uproar from an encampment of the

Ragged Men. His eyes flicked there, and he saw the Ragged Men running into and out of the tall wall of Death Mist. And they laughed uproariously and ran into and out of the Mist again.

His pilot dived down. The Ragged Men yelled and capered and howled derisively at him. He saw that they removed masklike things from their faces in order to shout, and donned them again before running again into the Mist. At once he understood. The Ragged Men had gas masks!

Then, a sudden cracking noise. Three men had opened fire with rifles from below. Their garments were drab-colored, in contrast to the vivid tints of the clothing of the inhabitants of Rahn. They were Jacaro's gunmen. And a great freight carrier from Yugna veered suddenly, and a bluish flash burst out before it, and it began to flutter helplessly down into the city beneath.

The weapons of Tommy's fleet were useless, since the citizens of Rahn were protected by gas masks. And Tommy's fighting ships were subject to the same rifle fire against their propelling grids that had defeated the fleet from Rahn. The only thing the avenging fleet could now accomplish was the death of the women it could not save.

CHAPTER IX. War!

A huge ornithopter came heavily out on the landing stage in the city of Rahn. Its crew took their places. With a creaking and rattling noise it rose toward the invading fleet. From its filigree cockpit sides, men waved green branches. A green light wavered from the big plane that carried the bearded Council man and Denham. That plane swept forward and hovered above the ornithopter. The two flying things seemed almost fastened together, so closely did their pilots maintain that same speed and course. A snaky rope went coiling down into the lower ship's cockpit. A burly figure began to climb it hand over hand. A second figure followed. A third figure, in the drab clothing that distinguished Jacaro's men from all others, wrapped the rope about himself and was hauled up bodily. And Tommy had seen Jacaro but once, yet he was suddenly grimly convinced that this was Jacaro himself.

The two planes swept apart. The ornithopter descended toward the landing stage of Rahn. The freight plane swept toward the ship that carried Tommy. Again the snaky rope coiled down. And Tommy swung up the fifteen feet that alone separated the two soaring planes, and looked into the hard, amused eyes of Jacaro where he sat between two other emissaries of Rahn. One of them was half naked and savage, with the light of madness in his eyes. A Ragged Man. The other was lean and desperate, despite the colored tunic of a civilized man that he wore.

* * * * *

"Hello," said Jacaro blandly. "We come up to talk things over."

Tommy gave him the briefest of nods. He looked at Denham—who was deathly white and grim—and the bearded Councilor.

"I' been givin' 'em the dope," said Jacaro easily. "We got the whip hand now. We got gas masks, we got guns just the same as you have, an' we got the women."

"You haven't ammunition," said Tommy evenly, "or damned little. Your men brought down one ship, and stopped. If you had enough shells would you have stopped there?"

Jacaro grinned.

"You got arithmetic, Reames," he conceded. "That's so. But—I'm sayin' it again—we got the women. Your girl, for one! Now, how about throwin' in with me, you an' the professor?"

"No," said Tommy.

"In a coupla months, Rahn'll be runnin' this planet," said Jacaro blandly, "and I'm runnin' Rahn! I didn't know how easy the racket'd be, or I'd 've let Yugna alone. I'd 've come here first. Now get it! Rahn runnin' the planet, with a couple guys runnin' Rahn an' passin' down through a Tube any little thing we want, like a few million bucks in solid gold. An' Rahn an' the other cities for kinda country homes for us an' our friends. All the women we want, good liquor, an' a swell time!"

"Talk sense," said Tommy, without even contempt in his tone.

* * * * *

Jacaro snarled.

"No sense actin' too big!" But the snarl encouraged Tommy, because it proved Jacaro less confidant than he tried to seem. His next change of tone proved it. "Aw, hell!" he said placatingly. "This is what I'm figurin' on. These guys ain't used to fighting, but they got the stuff. They got gases that are hell-roarin'. They got ships can beat any we got back home. Figure out the racket. A couple big Tubes, that'll let a ship—maybe folded—go through. A fleet of 'em floatin' over N'York, loaded with gas—that white stuff y' can steer wherever y' want it. Figure the shake-down. We could pull a hundred million from Chicago! We c'd take over the whole United States! Try that on y' piano! Me, King Jacaro, King of America!" His dark eyes flashed. "I'll give y' Canada or Mexico, whichever y' want. Name y' price, guy. A coupla months organizin' here, buildin' a big Tube, then...."

Tommy's expression did not change.

"If it were that easy," he said drily, "you wouldn't be bargaining. I'm not altogether a fool, Jacaro. We want those women back. You want something we've got, and you want it badly. Cut out the oratory and tell me the real price for the return of the women, unharmed."

Jacaro burst into a flood of profanity.

"I'd rather Evelyn died from gas," said Tommy, "than as your filthy Ragged

Men would kill her. And you know I mean it." He switched to the language of the cities to go on coldly: "If one woman is harmed, Rahn dies. We will shoot down every ship that rises from her stages. We will spray burning thermit through her streets. We will cover her towers with gas until her people starve in the gas masks they've made!"

The lean man in the tunic of Rahn snarled bitterly: "What matter? We starve now!"

Tommy turned upon him as Jacaro whirled and cursed him bitterly for the revealing outburst.

"We will ransom the women with food," said Tommy coldly—and then his eyes flamed, "and thrash you afterwards for fools!"

* * * * *

He made a gesture to the Keeper of Foodstuffs. It was unconsciously an authoritative gesture, though the Keeper of Foodstuffs was in the state of affairs in Yugna the head of the Council. But that old man spoke deliberately. The man from Rahn snarled his reply. And Tommy turned aside as the bargaining went on. He could see Evelyn down below, a tiny speck of khaki amid the rainbow-colored robes of the other women. This had been a savage expedition, to rescue or to avenge. It had deteriorated into a bargain. Tommy heard, dully, amounts of unfamiliar weights and measures of foodstuffs he did not recognize. He heard the time and place of payment named: the gate of Yugna, the third dawn hence. He hardly looked up as at some signal one of their own ornithopters slid below and the three ambassadors of Rahn prepared to go over the side. But Jacaro snarled out of one corner of his mouth.

"These guys are takin' each other's words. Maybe that's all right, but I'm warnin' you, if there's any double-crossin'...."

He was gone. The Keeper of Foodstuffs touched Tommy's shoulder.

"Our flier," he said slowly, "will make sure our women are as yet unharmed. We are to deliver the foods at our own city gate, and after the women have been returned. Rahn dares not keep them or harm them. We of Yugna keep our word. Even in Rahn they know it."

"But they won't keep theirs," said Tommy heavily. "Not with a man of Earth to lead them."

* * * * *

He watched with his heart in his mouth as the ornithopter alighted near the assembled women of Yugna. As the three ambassadors climbed out, he could hear the faint murmur of voices. The men of Yugna, under truce, called across the landing stage to the women of their own city, and the women replied to them. Then the crew of the one grounded freighter arrived on the landing stage and the flapping flier rose slowly and rejoined the fleet. Its crew shouted a shamefaced

reassurance to the flagship.

"I suppose," said Tommy bitterly, "we'd better go back—if you're sure the women are safe."

"I am sure," said the old man unhappily, "or I had not agreed to pay half the foodstuffs in Yugna for their return."

He withdrew into a troubled silence as the fleet swept far from triumphantly for him. Denham had not spoken at all, though his eyes had blazed savagely upon the men of Rahn. Now he spoke, dry-throatedly:

"Tommy—Evelyn—"

"She is all right so far," said Tommy bitterly. "She's to be ransomed by foodstuffs, paid at the gates of Yugna. And Jacaro bragged he's running Rahn—and they've got gas masks. We'd better be ready for trouble after the women are returned."

Denham nodded grimly. Tommy reached out and took one of the black tablets from the man beside him. He began to draw carefully, his eyes savage.

"What's that?"

"There's high-pressure steam in Yugna," said Tommy coldly. "I'm designing steam guns. Gravity feed of spherical projectiles. A jet of steam instead of gunpowder. They'll be low-velocity, but we can use big-calibre balls for shock effect, and with long barrels they ought to serve for a hundred yards or better. Smooth bore, of course."

Denham stirred. His lips were pinched.

"I'll design a gas mask," he said restlessly, "and Smithers and I, between us, will do what we can."

* * * * *

The air fleet went on over the waving tree-fern jungle in an unvarying monotony of bitterness. Presently Tommy wearily explained his design to the bearded Councilor who, with the quick comprehension of mechanical design apparently instinctive in these folk, grasped it immediately. He selected three of the six-man crew and passed Tommy's drawings to them. While the jungle flowed beneath the fleet they studied the sketches, made other drawings, and showed them eagerly to Tommy. When the fleet soared down to the scattered landing stages, not only was the design understood but apparently plans for production had been made. It did not take the men of the Golden City long to respond.

Tommy flung himself savagely into the work he had taken upon himself. It did not occur to him to ask for authority. He knew what had to be done and he set to work to do it, commanding men and materials as if there could be no question of disobedience. As a matter of fact, he yielded impatiently to an order of the Council that he should present himself in the Council hall, and, since no questions were

asked him, continued his organizing in the very presence of the Council, sending for information and giving orders in a low tone while the Council deliberated. A vote was taken by the voting machine. At its end, he was solemnly informed that, though not a native of Yugna, he was entrusted with the command of the defense forces of the city. His skill in arms—as evidenced by his defeat of the fleet of Rahn—and his ability in command—when he met the gas-mask defense of Rahn with a threat of starvation—moved the Council to that action. He accepted the command almost abstractedly, and hurried away to pick gun emplacements.

* * * * *

Within four hours after the return of the fleet, the first steam gun was ready for trial. Smithers appeared, sweat-streaked and vastly calm, to announce that others could be turned out in quantity.

"These guys have got the stuff," he said steadily. "Instead o' castin' their stuff, they shoot it on a core in a melted spray. They ain't got steel, an' copper's scarce, but they got some alloys that are good an' tough. One's part tungsten or I'm crazy."

Tommy nodded.

"Turn out all the guns you can," he said. "I look for fighting."

"Yeah," said Smithers. "Miss Evelyn's still all right?"

"Up to three hours ago," said Tommy grimly. "Every three hours one of our ships lands in Rahn and reports. We give the Rahnians their stuff at our own city gates. I've warned Jacaro that we've mounted thermit-throwers on our food stores. If he manages to gas us by surprise, nevertheless our foodstuffs can't be captured. They've got to turn over Evelyn and cart off their food before they dare to fight, else they'll starve."

"But—uh—there're other cities they could stick up, ain't there?"

"We've warned them," said Tommy curtly. "They've got thermit-throwers mounted on their food supplies, too. And they're desperate enough to keep Rahn off. They're willing enough to let Yugna do the fighting, but they know what Rahn's winning will mean."

Smithers turned away, then turned back.

"Uh—Mr. Reames," he said heavily, "these fellas've gone near crazy about governors an' reducing valves an' such. They're inventin' ways to use 'em on machines I don't make head or tail of. We got three-four hundred men loose from machines already, an' they're turnin' out these steam guns as soon as you check up. There'll be more loose by night. I had 'em spray some castin's for another Tube, too. Workin' like they do, an' with the tools they got, they make speed."

Tommy responded impatiently: "There's no steel, no iron for magnets."

"I know," admitted Smithers. "I'm tryin' steam cylinders to—uh—energize the castin's, instead o' coils. It'll be ready by mornin'. I wish you'd look it over, Mr.

Reames. If Miss Evelyn gets safe into the city, we could send her down the Tube to Earth until the fightin's over."

"I'll try to see it," said Tommy impatiently. "I'll try!"

* * * * *

He turned back to the set-up steam gun. A flexible pipe from a heavily insulated cylinder ran to it. A hopper dropped metallic balls down into a bored-out barrel, where they were sucked into the blast of superheated steam from the storage cylinder. At a touch of the trigger a monstrous cloud of steam poured out. It was six feet from the gun muzzle before it condensed enough to be visible. Then a huge white cloud developed; but the metal pellets went on with deadly force. Half an inch in diameter, they carried seven hundred yards at extreme elevation. Point-blank range was seventy-five yards. They would kill at three hundred, and stun or disable beyond that. At a hundred yards they would tear through a man's body.

Tommy was promised a hundred of the weapons, with their boilers, in two days. He selected their emplacements. He directed that a disabling device be inserted, so if rushed they could not be turned against their owners. He inspected the gas masks being turned out by the women, who in this emergency worked like the men. Though helpless before machinery, it seemed, they could contrive a fabric device like a gas mask.

The second day the work went on more desperately still. But Smithers' work in releasing men was telling. There were fifteen hundred governors, or reducing valves, or autocratic cut-outs in operation now. And fifteen hundred men were released from the machines, which had to be kept going to keep the city alive. With that many men, intelligent mechanics all, Tommy and Smithers worked wonders. Smithers drove them mercilessly, using profanity and mechanical drawings instead of speech. Denham withdrew twenty men and labored on top of one of the towers. Toward sunset of the second day, vast clouds of steam bellied out from it at odd, irregular intervals. Nothing else manifested itself. Those irregular belchings of steam continued until dark, but Tommy paid no attention to them. He was driving the gunners of the machine guns to practice. He was planning patrols, devising a reserve, mounting thermit-throwers, and arranging for the delivery of the promised ransom at the specified city gate. So far, there was no sign of anything unusual in Rahn. Messengers from Yugna saw the captive women regularly, once every three hours. The last to leave had reported them being loaded into great ground vehicles under a defending escort, to travel through the dark jungle roads to Yugna. A vast concourse of empty vehicles was trailing into the jungle after them, to bring back the food which would keep Rahn from starving, for a while. It all seemed wholly regular.

* * * * *

At dawn, the remaining ships of the air fleet of Rahn were soaring silently above the jungle about the Golden City. They made no threat. They offered no affront. But they soared, and soared....

A little after dawn, glitterings in the jungle announced the arrival of the convoy. Messengers, in advance, shouted the news. Men from Yugna went out to inspect. The atmosphere grew tense. The air fleet of Rahn drew closer.

Slowly, a great golden gateway yawned. Four ground vehicles rolled forward, and under escort of the Rahnians entered the city. Half the captive women from Yugna were within them. They alighted, weeping for joy, and were promptly whisked away. Evelyn was not among them. Tommy ground his teeth. An explanation came. When one half the promised ransom was paid, the others would be forthcoming.

Tommy gave grim orders. Half the foodstuffs were taken to the city gate—half, no more. At his direction, it was explained gently to the Rahnians that the rest of the ransom remained under guard of the thermit-throwers. It would not be exposed to capture until the last of the captives were released. There was argument, expostulation. The rest of the women appeared. Aten, at Tommy's express command, piled Evelyn and his own wife into a ground vehicle and came racing madly to the tower from which Tommy could see all the circuit of the city.

"You're all right?" asked Tommy. At Evelyn's speechless nod, he put his hand heavily on her shoulder. "I'm glad," he managed to say. "Put on that gas mask. Hell's going to pop in a minute."

He watched, every muscle tense. There was confusion about the city gate. Ground vehicles, loaded with foodstuffs, poured out of the gate and back toward the jungle. Other vehicles with improvised enlargements to their carrying platforms—making them into huge closed boxes—rolled up to the gate. The loaded vehicles rolled back and back and back, and ever more apparently empty ones crowded about the city gate waiting for admission.

Then there was a sudden flare of intolerable light. A wild yell arose. Clouds of steam shot up from the ready steam guns. But the circling air fleet turned as one ship and plunged for the city. The leaders began to drop smoking things that turned into monstrous pillars of prismatically-colored mist. A wave of deadly vapor rolled over the ramparts of the city. And then there was a long-continued ululation and the noise of battle. Ragged Men, hidden in the jungle, had swarmed upon the walls with ladders made of jungle reeds. They came over the parapet in a wave of howling madness. And they surged into the city, flinging gas bombs as they came.

CHAPTER X. The Fight

The city was pandemonium. Tommy, looking down from his post of command, swore softly under his breath. The Death Mist was harmless to the defenders of

Yugna as a gas, because of their gas masks. But it served as a screen. It blotted out the waves of attackers so the steam guns could not be aimed save at the shortest of short ranges. His precautions were taking effect, to be sure. Two thirds of the attackers were Ragged Men drawn from about half the surviving cities, and against such a horde Yugna could not have held out at all but for his preparations. Now the defenders took a heavy toll. Swarms of men came racing toward the open gate, their truncheons aglow in the sunlight. The ring of Death Mist was contracting as if to strangle the city, and it left the ramparts bare again. And from more than one point upon the battlements the roaring clouds of steam burst out again. A dozen guns concentrated on the racing men of Rahn, plunging from the jungle to enter by the gate. They were racing forward, without order but at top speed, to share in the fighting and loot. Then streams of metal balls tore into them. The front of the irregular column was wiped out utterly. Wide swathes were cut in the rest. The survivors ran wildly forward over a litter of dead and dying men. Electric-charge weapons sent crackling discharges among them. Their contorted figures reeled and fell or leaped convulsively to lie forever still where they struck. And then the steam guns turned about to fire into the rear of the men who had charged past them.

The steam guns had literally blasted away the line of Ragged Men where they stood. But the line went on, with great ragged gaps in it, to be sure, but still vastly outnumbering the defenders of the city. Here and there a steam gun was silent, its gun crew dead. And presently those that were left were useless, immobile upon the ramparts in the rear of the attack.

* * * * *

Down in the ways of the city the fight rose to a riotous clamor. At Tommy's order the women of the city had been concentrated into a few strong towers. The machines of the city were left undefended for a time. A few strong patrols of fighting men, strategically placed, flung themselves with irresistible force upon certain bands of maddened Ragged Men. But where a combat raged, there the Ragged Men swarmed howling. Their hatred impelled them to suicidal courage and to unspeakable atrocities. From his tower, Tommy saw a man of Yugna, evidently a prisoner. Four Ragged Men surrounded him, literally tearing him to pieces like the maniacs they were. Then he saw dust spurting up in a swift-advancing line, and all four Ragged Men twitched and collapsed on top of their victim. A steam gun had done that. A fighting patrol of the men of Yugna swept fiercely down a paved way in one of the Golden City's vehicles. There was the glint of gold from it. A solid, choked mass of invaders rushed upon it. Without slackening speed, without a pause, the vehicle raced ahead. Intolerable flashes of light appeared. A thermit-thrower was mounted on the machine. It drove forward like a flaming meteor, and as electric-charge weapons flashed upon it men screamed and died. It tore into a vast cloud of the Death Mist and the unbearable flames of its weapon

could only be seen as illuminations of that deadly vapor.

A part of the city was free of defenders, save the isolated steam gunners left behind upon the walls. Ragged Men, drunk with success, ran through its ways, slashing at the walls, battering at the light-panels, pounding upon the doorways of the towers. Tommy saw them hacking at the great doorway of a tower. It gave. They rushed within. Almost instantly thereafter the opening spouted them forth again and after them, leaping upon them, snapping and biting and striking out with monstrous paws and teeth, were green lizard-things like the one that had been killed—years back, it seemed—on Earth. A deadly combat began instantly. But when the last of the fighting creatures was down, no more than a dozen were left of the three score who had begun the fight.

* * * * *

But this was not the main battle. The main battle was hidden under the Death-Mist cloud, concentrated in a vast thick mass in the very center of the city. Tommy watched that grimly. Perhaps eight thousand men had assailed the city. Certainly two thousand of them were represented by the still or twitching forms in queer attitudes here and there, in single dots or groups. There were seven hundred corpses before the city gate alone, where the steam guns had mowed down a reinforcing column. And there were others scattered all about. The defenders had lost heavily enough, but Tommy's defense behind the line of the ramparts was soundly concentrated in strong points, equipped with steam guns and mostly armed with thermit-throwers as well. From the center of the city there came only a vast, unorganized tumult of battle and death.

Then a huge winged thing came soaring down past Tommy's tower. It landed with a crash on the roofs below, spilling its men like ants. Tommy strained his eyes. There was a billowing outburst of steam from the tower where Denham had been working the night before. A big flier burst into the weird bright flame of the thermit fluid. It fell, splitting apart as it dropped. Again the billowing steam. No result—but beyond the city walls showed a flash of thermit flame.

"Denham!" muttered Tommy. "He's got a steam cannon; he's shooting shells loaded with thermit! They smash when they hit. Good!"

He dispatched a man with orders, but a messenger was panting his way up as the runner left. He thrust a scribbled bit of paper into Tommy's hand.

"I'm trying to bring down the ship that's controlling the Death Mist. I'll shell those devils in the middle of town as soon as our controls can handle the Mist.

—Denham."

Tommy began to snap out his commands. He raced downward toward the street. Men seemed to spring up like magic about him. A ship with one wing aflame was tottering in mid-air, and another was dropping like a plummet.

Then Tommy uttered a roar of pure joy. The huge globe of beautiful, deadly vapor was lifting! Its control-ship was shattered, and men of the Golden City had found its setting. The Mist rose swiftly in a single vast globule of varicolored reflections. And the situation in the center of the city was clear. Two towers were besieged. Dense masses of the invaders crowded about them, battering at them. Steam guns opened from their windows. Thermit-throwers shot out flashes of deadly fire.

Tommy led five hundred men in savage assault, cleaving the mass of invaders like a wedge. He cut off a hundred men and wiped them out, while a rear guard poured electric charges into the main body of the enemy. More men of Yugna came leaping from a dozen doorways and joined them. Tommy found Smithers by his side, powder-stained and sweat-streaked.

* * * * *

"Miss Evelyn's all right?" Smithers asked in a great calm.

"She is," growled Tommy. "On the top floor of a tower, with a hundred men to guard her."

"You didn't look at the Tube I made," said Smithers impassively; "but I turned on the steam. Looks like it worked. It's ready to go through, anyways. It's the same place the other one was, down in that cellar. I'm tellin' you in case anything happens."

He opened fire with a magazine rifle into the thick of the mob that assailed the two towers. Tommy left him with fifty men to block a highway and led his men again into the mass of mingled Ragged Men and Rahnians. His followers saw his tactics now. They split off a section of the mob and fell upon it ferociously. There were sudden awful screams. Thermit flame was rising from two places in the very thick of the mob. It burst up from a third, and fourth, and fifth.... Denham, atop his tower, had the range with his steam cannon, and was flinging heavy shells into the attackers of the two central buildings. And then there was a roaring of steam and a ground vehicle came to a stop not fifty feet away. A gun crew of Yugnans had shifted their unwieldy weapon and its insulated steam boiler to a freight-carrying vehicle. Now the gunner pulled trigger and traversed his weapon into the thick of the massed invaders, while his companions worked desperately to keep the hopper full of projectiles.

The invaders melted away. Steam guns in the towers, thermit projectiles from the cannon far away: now this.... And the concealing cloud of Death Mist was rising still, headed straight up toward the zenith. It looked like a tiny, dwindling pearl.

* * * * *

The assault upon Yugna had been a mad one, a frantic one. But the flight from Yugna was the flight of men trying to escape from hell. Wild panic characterized the fleeing men. They threw aside their weapons and ran with screams of terror

no whit less horrible than their howls of triumph had been. And Tommy would have stopped the slaughter, but there was no way to send orders to the rampart gunners in time. As the fugitives swarmed toward the walls again, the storms of steam-propelled missiles mowed them down. Even those who scrambled down to the ground outside and fled sobbing for the jungle were pursued by hails of bullets. Of the eight thousand men who assailed Yugna, less than one in five escaped.

Pursuit was still in progress. Here and there, through the city, the sound of isolated combats still went on. Denham came down from his tower, looking rather sick as he saw the carnage about him. A strong escort brought Evelyn. Aten was grinning proudly, as though he had in person defeated the enemy. And as Evelyn shakingly put out her hand to touch Tommy's arm—it was only later that he realized he had been wounded in half a dozen minor ways—a shadow roared over their heads. The crackle of firearms came from it.

"Jacaro!" snarled Tommy. He leaped instinctively to pursue. But the flying thing was bound for a landing in an open square, the same one which not long since had seen the heaviest fighting. It alighted there and toppled askew on contact. Figures tumbled out of it, in torn and ragged garments fashioned in the style of the very best tailors of the Earth's underworld.

Men of Yugna raced to intercept them. Firearms spat and bellowed luridly. In a close-knit, flame-spitting group, the knot of men raced over fallen bodies and hurtled areas where the pavement had cooled to no more than a dull-red heat where a thermit shell had struck. One man, two, three men fell under the small-arms fire. The gangsters went racing on, firing desperately. They dived into a tunnel and disappeared.

* * * * *

"The Tube!" roared Smithers. "They' goin' for the Tube!"

He plunged forward, and Tommy seized his arm.

"They'll go through your Tube," he said curtly. "It looks like the one they came through. They'll think it is. Let 'em!"

Smithers tried to tear free.

"But they'll get back to Earth!" he raged. "They'll get off clear!"

The sharp, cracking sound of a gun-cotton explosion came out of the doorway into which Jacaro and his men had dived. Tommy smiled very grimly indeed.

"They've gone through," he said drily, "and they've blown up the Tube behind them. But—I didn't tell you—I took a look at your castings. Your pupils were putting them together, ready for the steam to go in, in place of the coils I used. But—er—Smithers! You'd discarded one pair of castings. They didn't satisfy you. Your pupils forgot that. They hooked them all together."

Smithers gulped.

"Instead of four right-angled bends," said Tommy grimly, "you have six connected together. You turned on the steam in a hurry, not noticing. And I don't know how many series of dimensions there are in this universe of ours. We know of two. There may be any number. But Jacaro and his men didn't go back to Earth. God only knows where they landed, or what it's like. Maybe somewhere a million miles in space. Nobody knows. The main thing is that Earth is safe now. The Death Mist has faded out of the picture."

He turned and smiled warmly at Evelyn. He was a rather horrible sight just then, though he did not know it. He was bloody and burned and wounded. He ignored all matters but success, however.

"I think," he said drily, "we have won the confidence of the Golden City, Evelyn, and that there'll be no more talk of gassing Earth. As soon as the Council meets again, we'll make sure. And then—well, I think we can devote a certain amount of time to our personal affairs. You are the first Earth-girl to be kissed in the Fifth Dimension. We'll have to see if you can't distinguish yourself further."

* * * * *

Again the Council hall in the tower of government in the Golden City of Yugna. Again the queer benches about the black wood table—though two of the seats that had been occupied were now empty. Again the guards behind the chairs, and the crowd of watchers—visitors, citizens of Yugna attending the deliberations of the Council. The audience was a queer one, this time. There were bandages here and there. There were men who were wounded, broken, bent and crippled in the fighting. But a warmly welcoming murmur spread through the hall as Tommy came in, himself rather extensively patched. He was wearing the tunic and breeches of the Golden City, because his own clothes were hopelessly beyond repair. The bearded old Councilor gathered the eyes of his fellows. They rose. This Council seated itself as one man.

Quiet, placid formalities. The Keeper of Foodstuffs murmured that the ransom paid to Rahn had been recaptured after the fight. The Keeper of Rolls reported with savage satisfaction the number of enemies who had been slain in battle. He added that the loss to Yugna was less than one man to ten of the enemy. And he added with still greater emphasis that the shops being fitted with automatic controls had released now—it had grown so much—two thousand men from the necessary day-and-night working force, and further releases were to be expected. The demands of the machines were lessened already beyond the memory of man. Eyes turned to Tommy. There was an expectant pause for his reply.

* * * * *

"I have been Commander of Defense Forces," he told them slowly, "in this fighting. I have given you weapons. My two friends have done more. The ma-

chines will need fewer and fewer attendants as the hints they have given you are developed by yourselves. And there is some hope that one of my friends may show you, in ultra-sonic vibrations, a weapon against the jungle itself. My own work is finished. But I ask again for friendship for my planet Earth. I ask that no war be made on my own people. I ask that what benefits you receive from us be passed to the other surviving cities on the same terms. And since there can be no further fighting on this scale, I give back my commission as Commander of Defense."

There was a little murmur among the men of Yugna, looking on. It rose to a protesting babble, to a shout of denial. The bearded old Keeper of Foodstuffs smiled.

"It is proposed that the appointment as Commander of Defense Forces be permanent," he said mildly.

He produced the queer black box and touched it in a certain fashion. He passed it to the next man, and the next and next. It went around the table. It passed a second time, but this time each man merely looked at the top.

"You command the defense forces of Yugna for always," said the bearded old man, gently. "Now give orders that your requests become laws."

* * * * *

Tommy stared blankly. He was suddenly aware of Aten in the background, smiling triumphantly and very happily at him. There was something like a roar of approval from the men of Yugna, assembled.

"Just what," demanded Tommy, "does this mean?"

"For many years," said a hawk-faced man ungraciously, "we have had no Commander of Defense. We have had no wars. But we see it is needful. We have chosen you, with all agreeing. The Commander of Defense"—he sniffed a little, pugnaciously—"has the authority the ancient kings once owned."

Tommy leaned back in the curious benchlike chair, his eyes narrow and thoughtful. This would simplify matters. No danger of trouble to Earth. A free hand for Denham and Smithers to help these folk, and for Denham to learn scientific facts—in the sciences they had developed—which would be of inestimable value to Earth. And it could be possible to open a peaceful trade with the nations of Earth without any danger of war. And maybe....

He smiled suddenly. It widened almost into a grin.

"All right. I'll settle down here for a while. But—er—just how does one set about getting married here?"

THE PEOPLE OF THE CRATER

"Send the Black Throne to dust; conquer the Black Ones, and bring the Daughter from the Caves of Darkness." These were the tasks Garin must perform to fulfill the prophecy of the Ancient Ones—and establish his own destiny in this hidden land!

CHAPTER ONE

Through the Blue Haze

Six months and three days after the Peace of Shanghai was signed and the great War of 1965-1970 declared at an end by an exhausted world, a young man huddled on a park bench in New York, staring miserably at the gravel beneath his badly worn shoes. He had been trained to fill the pilot's seat in the control cabin of a fighting plane and for nothing else. The search for a niche in civilian life had cost him both health and ambition.

A newcomer dropped down on the other end of the bench. The flyer studied him bitterly. He had decent shoes, a warm coat, and that air of satisfaction with the world which is the result of economic security. Although he was well into middle age, the man had a compact grace of movement and an air of alertness.

"Aren't you Captain Garin Featherstone?"

Startled, the flyer nodded dumbly.

From a plump billfold the man drew a clipping and waved it toward his seat mate. Two years before, Captain Garin Featherstone of the United Democratic Forces had led a perilous bombing raid into the wilds of Siberia to wipe out the vast expeditionary army secretly gathering there. It had been a spectacular affair and had brought the survivors some fleeting fame.

"You're the sort of chap I've been looking for," the stranger folded the clipping again, "a flyer with courage, initiative and brains. The man who led that raid is worth investing in."

"What's the proposition?" asked Featherstone wearily. He no longer believed in luck.

"I'm Gregory Farson," the other returned as if that should answer the question.

"The Antarctic man!"

"Just so. As you have probably heard, I was halted on the eve of my last expedition by the sudden spread of war to this country. Now I am preparing to sail south again."

"But I don't see—"

"How you can help me? Very simple, Captain Featherstone. I need pilots. Unfortunately the war has disposed of most of them. I'm lucky to contact one such as yourself—"

* * * * *

And it was as simple as that. But Garin didn't really believe that it was more than a dream until they touched the glacial shores of the polar continent some months later. As they brought ashore the three large planes, he began to wonder at the driving motive behind Farson's vague plans.

When the supply ship sailed, not to return for a year, Farson called them together. Three of the company were pilots, all war veterans, and two were engineers who spent most of their waking hours engrossed in the maps Farson produced.

* * * * *

"Tomorrow," the leader glanced from face to face, "we start inland. Here—" On a map spread before him he indicated a line marked in purple.

"Ten years ago I was a member of the Verdane expedition. Once, when flying due south, our plane was caught by some freakish air current and drawn off its course. When we were totally off our map, we saw in the distance a thick bluish haze. It seemed to rise in a straight line from the ice plain to the sky. Unfortunately our fuel was low and we dared not risk a closer investigation. So we fought our way back to the base.

"Verdane, however, had little interest in our report and we did not investigate it. Three years ago that Kattack expedition, hunting oil deposits by the order of the Dictator, reported seeing the same haze. This time we are going to explore it!"

"Why," Garin asked curiously, "are you so eager to penetrate this haze?—I gather that's what we're to do—"

Farson hesitated before answering. "It has often been suggested that beneath the ice sheeting of this continent may be hidden mineral wealth. I believe that the haze is caused by some form of volcanic activity, and perhaps a break in the crust."

Garin frowned at the map. He wasn't so sure about that explanation, but Farson was paying the bills. The flyer shrugged away his uneasiness. Much could be for-

given a man who allowed one to eat regularly again.

Four days later they set out. Helmly, one of the engineers, Rawlson, a pilot, and Farson occupied the first plane. The other engineer and pilot were in the second and Garin, with the extra supplies, was alone in the third.

He was content to be alone as they took off across the blue-white waste. His ship, because of its load, was loggy, so he did not attempt to follow the other two into the higher lane. They were in communication by radio and Garin, as he snapped on his earphones, remembered something Farson had said that morning:

"The haze affects radio. On our trip near it the static was very bad. Almost," with a laugh, "like speech in some foreign tongue."

As they roared over the ice Garin wondered if it might have been speech—from, perhaps, a secret enemy expedition, such as the Kattack one.

In his sealed cockpit he did not feel the bite of the frost and the ship rode smoothly. With a little sigh of content he settled back against the cushions, keeping to the course set by the planes ahead and above him.

Some five hours after they left the base, Garin caught sight of a dark shadow far ahead. At the same time Farson's voice chattered in his earphones.

"That's it. Set course straight ahead."

The shadow grew until it became a wall of purple-blue from earth to sky. The first plane was quite close to it, diving down into the vapor. Suddenly the ship rocked violently and swung earthward as if out of control. Then it straightened and turned back. Garin could hear Farson demanding to know what was the matter. But from the first plane there was no reply.

As Farson's plane kept going Garin throttled down. The actions of the first ship indicated trouble. What if that haze were a toxic gas?

"Close up, Featherstone!" barked Farson suddenly.

He obediently drew ahead until they flew wing to wing. The haze was just before them and now Garin could see movement in it, oily, impenetrable billows. The motors bit into it. There was clammy, foggy moisture on the windows.

Abruptly Garin sensed that he was no longer alone. Somewhere in the empty cabin behind him was another intelligence, a measuring power. He fought furiously against it—against the very idea of it. But, after a long, terrifying moment while it seemed to study him, it took control. His hands and feet still manipulated the ship, but it flew!

On the ship hurtled through the thickening mist. He lost sight of Farson's plane. And, though he was still fighting against the will which over-rode his, his struggles grew weaker. Then came the order to dive into the dark heart of the purple mists.

* * * * *

Down they whirled. Once, as the haze opened, Garin caught a glimpse of tortured gray rock seamed with yellow. Farson had been right: here the ice crust was broken.

Down and down. If his instruments were correct the plane was below sea level now. The haze thinned and was gone. Below spread a plain cloaked in vivid green. Here and there reared clumps of what might be trees. He saw, too, the waters of a yellow stream.

But there was something terrifyingly alien about that landscape. Even as he circled above it, Garin wrested to break the grip of the will that had brought him there. There came a crackle of sound in his earphones and at that moment the Presence withdrew.

The nose of the plane went up in obedience to his own desire. Frantically he climbed away from the green land. Again the haze absorbed him. He watched the moisture bead on the windows. Another hundred feet or so and he would be free of it—and that unbelievable world beneath.

Then, with an ominous sputter, the port engine conked out. The plane lurched and slipped into a dive. Down it whirled again into the steady light of the green land.

Trees came out of the ground, huge fern-like plants with crimson scaled trunks. Toward a clump of these the plane swooped.

Frantically Garin fought the controls. The ship steadied, the dive became a fast glide. He looked for an open space to land. Then he felt the landing gear scrape some surface. Directly ahead loomed one of the fern trees. The plane sped toward the long fronds. There came a ripping crash, the splintering of metal and wood. The scarlet cloud gathering before Garin's eyes turned black.

CHAPTER TWO

The Folk of Tav

Garin returned to consciousness through a red mist of pain. He was pinned in the crumpled mass of metal which had once been the cabin. Through a rent in the wall close to his head thrust a long spike of green, shredded leaves still clinging to it. He lay and watched it, not daring to move lest the pain prove more than he could bear.

It was then that he heard the pattering sound outside. It seemed as if soft hands were pushing and pulling at the wreck. The tree branch shook and a portion of the cabin wall dropped away with a clang.

Garin turned his head slowly. Through the aperture was clambering a goblin figure.

It stood about five feet tall, and it walked upon its hind legs in human fashion,

but the legs were short and stumpy, ending in feet with five toes of equal length. Slender, shapely arms possessed small hands with only four digits. The creature had a high, well-rounded forehead but no chin, the face being distinctly lizard-like in contour. The skin was a dull black, with a velvety surface. About its loins it wore a short kilt of metallic cloth, the garment being supported by a jeweled belt of exquisite workmanship.

For a long moment the apparition eyed Garin. And it was those golden eyes, fixed unwinkingly on his, which banished the flyer's fear. There was nothing but great pity in their depths.

The lizard-man stooped and brushed the sweat-dampened hair from Garin's forehead. Then he fingered the bonds of metal which held the flyer, as if estimating their strength. Having done so, he turned to the opening and apparently gave an order, returning again to squat by Garin.

Two more of his kind appeared to tear away the ruins of the cockpit. Though they were very careful, Garin fainted twice before they had freed him. He was placed on a litter swung between two clumsy beasts which might have been small elephants, except that they lacked trunks and possessed four tusks each.

They crossed the plain to the towering mouth of a huge cavern where the litter was taken up by four of the lizard-folk. The flyer lay staring up at the roof of the cavern. In the black stone had been carved fronds and flowers in bewildering profusion. Shining motes, giving off faint light, sifted through the air. At times as they advanced, these gathered in clusters and the light grew brighter.

Midway down a long corridor the bearers halted while their leader pulled upon a knob on the wall. An oval door swung back and the party passed through.

They came into a round room, the walls of which had been fashioned of creamy quartz veined with violet. At the highest point in the ceiling a large globe of the motes hung, furnishing soft light below.

Two lizard-men, clad in long robes, conferred with the leader of the flyer's party before coming to stand over Garin. One of the robed ones shook his head at the sight of the flyer's twisted body and waved the litter on into an inner chamber.

Here the walls were dull blue and in the exact center was a long block of quartz. By this the litter was put down and the bearers disappeared. With sharp knives the robed men cut away furs and leather to expose Garin's broken body.

They lifted him to the quartz table and there made him fast with metal bonds. Then one of them went to the wall and pulled a gleaming rod. From the dome of the roof shot an eerie blue light to beat upon Garin's helpless body. There followed a tingling through every muscle and joint, a prickling sensation in his skin, but soon his pain vanished as if it had never been.

The light flashed off and the three lizard-men gathered around him. He was wrapped in a soft robe and carried to another room. This, too, was circular, shaped

like the half of a giant bubble. The floor sloped toward the center where there was a depression filled with cushions. There they laid Garin. At the top of the bubble, a pinkish cloud formed. He watched it drowsily until he fell asleep.

Something warm stirred against his bare shoulder. He opened his eyes, for a moment unable to remember where he was. Then there was a plucking at the robe twisted about him and he looked down.

If the lizard-folk had been goblin in their grotesqueness this visitor was elfin. It was about three feet high, its monkey-like body completely covered with silky white hair. The tiny hands were human in shape and hairless, but its feet were much like a cat's paws. From either side of the small round head branched large fan-shaped ears. The face was furred and boasted stiff cat whiskers on the upper lip. These Anas, as Garin learned later, were happy little creatures, each one choosing some mistress or master among the Folk, as this one had come to him. They were content to follow their big protector, speechless with delight at trifling gifts. Loyal and brave, they could do simple tasks or carry written messages for their chosen friend, and they remained with him until death. They were neither beast nor human, but rumored to be the result of some experiment carried out eons ago by the Ancient Ones.

After patting Garin's shoulder the Ana touched the flyer's hair wonderingly, comparing the bronze lengths with its own white fur. Since the Folk were hairless, hair was a strange sight in the Caverns. With a contented purr, it rubbed its head against his hand.

With a sudden click a door in the wall opened. The Ana got to its feet and ran to greet the newcomers. The chieftain of the Folk, he who had first discovered Garin, entered, followed by several of his fellows.

The flyer sat up. Not only was the pain gone but he felt stronger and younger than he had for weary months. Exultingly, he stretched wide his arms and grinned at the lizard-being who murmured happily in return.

Lizard-men busied themselves about Garin, girding on him the short kilt and jewel-set belt which were the only clothing of the Caverns. When they were finished, the chieftain took his hand and drew him to the door.

They traversed a hallway whose walls were carved and inlaid with glittering stones and metalwork, coming, at last, into a huge cavern, the outer walls of which were hidden by shadows. On a dais stood three tall thrones and Garin was conducted to the foot of these.

The highest throne was of rose crystal. On its right was one of green jade, worn smooth by centuries of time. At the left was the third, carved of a single block of jet. The rose throne and that of jet were unoccupied, but in the seat of jade reposed one of the Folk. He was taller than his fellows, and in his eyes, as he stared at Garin, was wisdom—and a brooding sadness.

"It is well!" The words resounded in the flyer's head. "We have chosen wisely. This youth is fit to mate with the Daughter. But he will be tried, as fire tries metal. He must win the Daughter forth and strive with Kepta—"

A hissing murmur echoed through the hall. Garin guessed that hundreds of the Folk must be gathered there.

"Urg!" the being on the throne commanded.

The chieftain moved a step toward the dais.

"Do you take this youth and instruct him. And then will I speak with him again. For—" sadness colored the words now—"we would have the rose throne filled again and the black one blasted into dust. Time moves swiftly."

The Chieftain led a wondering Garin away.

CHAPTER THREE

Garin Hears of the Black Ones

Urg brought the flyer into one of the bubble-shaped rooms which contained a low, cushioned bench facing a metal screen—and here they seated themselves.

What followed was a language lesson. On the screen appeared objects which Urg would name, to have his sibilant uttering repeated by Garin. As the American later learned, the ray treatment he had undergone had quickened his mental powers, and in an incredibly short time he had a working vocabulary.

Judging by the pictures the lizard folk were the rulers of the crater world, although there were other forms of life there. The elephant-like Tand was a beast of burden, the squirrel-like Eron lived underground and carried on a crude agriculture in small clearings, coming shyly twice a year to exchange grain for a liquid rubber produced by the Folk.

Then there was the Gibi, a monstrous bee, also friendly to the lizard people. It supplied the cavern dwellers with wax, and in return the Folk gave the Gibi colonies shelter during the unhealthful times of the Great Mists.

Highly civilized were the Folk. They did no work by hand, except the finer kinds of jewel setting and carving. Machines wove their metal cloth, machines prepared their food, harvested their fields, hollowed out new dwellings.

Freed from manual labor they had turned to acquiring knowledge. Urg projected on the screen pictures of vast laboratories and great libraries of scientific lore. But all they knew in the beginning, they had learned from the Ancient Ones, a race unlike themselves, which had preceded them in sovereignty over Tav. Even the Folk themselves were the result of constant forced evolution and experimentation carried on by these Ancient Ones.

All this wisdom was guarded most carefully, but against what or whom, Urg could not tell, although he insisted that the danger was very real. There was some-

thing within the blue wall of the crater which disputed the Folk's rule.

As Garin tried to probe further a gong sounded. Urg arose.

"It is the hour of eating," he announced. "Let us go."

They came to a large room where a heavy table of white stone stretched along three walls, benches before it. Urg seated himself and pressed a knob on the table, motioning Garin to do likewise. The wall facing them opened and two trays slid out. There was a platter of hot meat covered with rich sauce, a stone bowl of grain porridge and a cluster of fruit, still fastened to a leafy branch. This the Ana eyed so wistfully that Garin gave it to the creature.

The Folk ate silently and arose quietly when they had finished, their trays vanishing back through the wall. Garin noticed only males in the room and recalled that he had, as yet, seen no females among the Folk. He ventured a question.

Urg chuckled. "So, you think there are no women in the Caverns? Well, we shall go to the Hall of Women that you may see."

To the Hall of Women they went. It was breath-taking in its richness, stones worth a nation's ransom sparkling from its domed roof and painted walls. Here were the matrons and maidens of the Folk, their black forms veiled in robes of silver net, each cross strand of which was set with a tiny gem, so that they appeared to be wrapped in glittering scales.

There were not many of them—a hundred perhaps. And a few led by the hand smaller editions of themselves, who stared at Garin with round yellow eyes and chewed black fingertips shyly.

The women were intrusted with the finest jewel work, and with pride they showed the stranger their handiwork. At the far end of the hall was a wonderous thing in the making. One of the silver nets, which were the foundations of their robes, was fastened there and three of the women were putting small rose jewels into each microscopic setting. Here and there they had varied the pattern with tiny emeralds or flaming opals, so that the finished portion was a rainbow.

One of the workers smoothed the robe and glanced up at Garin, a gentle teasing in her voice as she explained:

"This is for the Daughter when she comes to her throne."

The Daughter! What had the Lord of the Folk said? "This youth is fit to mate with the Daughter." But Urg had said that the Ancient Ones had gone from Tav.

"Who is the Daughter?" he demanded.

"Thrala of the Light."

"Where is she?"

The woman shivered and there was fear in her eyes. "Thrala lies in the Caves of Darkness."

"The Caves of Darkness!" Did she mean Thrala was dead? Was he, Garin

Featherstone, to be the victim of some rite of sacrifice which was designed to unite him with the dead?

Urg touched his arm. "Not so. Thrala has not yet entered the Place of Ancestors."

"You know my thoughts?"

Urg laughed. "Thoughts are easy to read. Thrala lives. Sera served the Daughter as handmaiden while she was yet among us. Sera, do you show us Thrala as she was."

The woman crossed to a wall where there was a mirror such as Urg had used for his language lesson. She gazed into it and then beckoned the flyer to stand beside her.

The mirror misted and then he was looking, as if through a window, into a room with walls and ceiling of rose quartz. On the floor were thick rugs of silver rose. And a great heap of cushions made a low couch in the center.

"The inner chamber of the Daughter," Sera announced.

* * * * *

A circular panel in the wall opened and a woman slipped through. She was very young, little more than a girl. There were happy curves in her full crimson lips, joyous lights in her violet eyes.

She was human of shape, but her beauty was unearthly. Her skin was pearl white and other colors seemed to play faintly upon it, so that it reminded Garin of mother-of-pearl with its lights and shadows. The hair, which veiled her as a cloud, was blue-black and reached below her knees. She was robed in the silver net of the Folk and there was a heavy girdle of rose-shaded jewels about her slender waist.

"That was Thrala before the Black Ones took her," said Sera.

Garin uttered a cry of disappointment as the picture vanished. Urg laughed.

"What care you for shadows when the Daughter herself waits for you? You have but to bring her from the Caves of Darkness—"

"Where are these Caves—" Garin's question was interrupted by the pealing of the Cavern gong. Sera cried out:

"The Black Ones!"

Urg shrugged. "When they spared not the Ancient Ones how could we hope to escape? Come, we must go to the Hall of Thrones."

Before the jade throne of the Lord of the Folk stood a small group of the lizard-men beside two litters. As Garin entered the Lord spoke.

"Let the outlander come hither that he may see the work of the Black Ones."

Garin advanced unwillingly, coming to stand by those struggling things which gasped their message between moans and screams of agony. They were men of

the Folk but their black skins were green with rot.

The Lord leaned forward on his throne. "It is well," he said. "You may depart."

As if obeying his command, the tortured things let go of the life to which they had clung and were still.

"Look upon the work of the Black Ones," the ruler said to Garin. "Jiv and Betv were captured while on a mission to the Gibi of the Cliff. It seems that the Black Ones needed material for their laboratories. They seek even to give the Daughter to their workers of horror!"

A terrible cry of hatred arose from the hall, and Garin's jaw set. To give that fair vision he had just seen to such a death as this—!

"Jiv and Betv were imprisoned close to the Daughter and they heard the threats of Kepta. Our brothers, stricken with foul disease, were sent forth to carry the plague to us, but they swam through the pool of boiling mud. They have died, but the evil died with them. And I think that while we breed such as they, the Black Ones shall not rest easy. Listen now, outlander, to the story of the Black Ones and the Caves of Darkness, of how the Ancient Ones brought the Folk up from the slime of a long dried sea and made them great, and of how the Ancient Ones at last went down to their destruction."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Defeat of the Ancient Ones

"In the days before the lands of the outer world were born of the sea, before even the Land of the Sun (Mu) and the Land of the Sea (Atlantis) arose from molten rock and sand, there was land here in the far south. A sere land of rock plains, and swamps where slimy life mated, lived and died.

"Then came the Ancient Ones from beyond the stars. Their race was already older than this earth. Their wise men had watched its birth-rending from the sun. And when their world perished, taking most of their blood into nothingness, a handful fled hither.

"But when they climbed from their space ship it was into hell. For they had gained, in place of their loved home, bare rock and stinking slime.

"They blasted out this Tav and entered into it with the treasures of their flying ships and also certain living creatures captured in the swamps. From these, they produced the Folk, the Gibi, the Tand, and the land-tending Eron.

"Among these, the Folk were eager for wisdom and climbed high. But still the learning of the Ancient Ones remained beyond their grasp.

"During the eons the Ancient Ones dwelt within their protecting wall of haze the outer world changed. Cold came to the north and south; the Land of Sun and the Land of Sea arose to bear the foot of true man. On their mirrors of seeing the

Ancient Ones watched man-life spread across the world. They had the power of prolonging life, but still the race was dying. From without must come new blood. So certain men were summoned from the Land of the Sun. Then the race flourished for a space.

"The Ancient Ones decided to leave Tav for the outer world. But the sea swallowed the Land of Sun. Again, in the time of the Land of Sea, the stock within Tav was replenished and the Ancient Ones prepared for exodus; again the sea cheated them.

"Those men left in the outer world reverted to savagery. Since the Ancient Ones would not mingle their blood with that of almost beasts, they built the haze wall stronger and remained. But a handful of them were attracted by the forbidden, and secretly they summoned the beast men. Of that monstrous mating came the Black Ones. They live but for the evil they may do, and the power which they acquired is debased and used to forward cruelty.

"At first their sin was not discovered. When it was, the others would have slain the offspring but for the law which forbids them to kill. They must use their power for good or it departs from them. So they drove the Black Ones to the southern end of Tav and gave them the Caves of Darkness. Never were the Black Ones to come north of the River of Gold—nor were the Ancient Ones to go south of it.

"For perhaps two thousand years the Black Ones kept the law. But they worked, building powers of destruction. While matters rested thus, the Ancient Ones searched the world, seeking men by whom they could renew the race. Once there came men from an island far to the north. Six lived to penetrate the mists and take wives among the Daughters. Again, they called the yellow-haired men of another breed, great sea rovers.

"But the Black Ones called too. As the Ancient Ones searched for the best, the Black Ones brought in great workers of evil. And, at last, they succeeded in shutting off the channels of sending thought so that the Ancient Ones could call no more.

"Then did the Black Ones cross the River of Gold and enter the land of the Ancient Ones. Thran, Dweller in the Light and Lord of the Caverns, summoned the Folk to him.

"'There will come one to aid you,' he told us. 'Try the summoning again after the Black Ones have seemed to win. Thrala, Daughter of the Light, will not enter into the Room of Pleasant Death with the rest of the women, but will give herself into the hands of the Black Ones, that they may think themselves truly victorious. You of the Folk withdraw into the Place of Reptiles until the Black Ones are gone. Nor will all the Ancient Ones perish—more will be saved, but the manner of their preservation I dare not tell. When the sun-haired youth comes from the outer world, send him into the Caves of Darkness to rescue Thrala and put an end to evil.'

"And then the Lady Thrala arose and said softly, 'As the Lord Thran has said, so let it be. I shall deliver myself into the hands of the Black Ones that their doom may come upon them.'

"Lord Thran smiled upon her as he said: 'So will happiness be your portion. After the Great Mists, does not light come again?'

"The women of the Ancient Ones then took their leave and passed into the place of Pleasant Death while the men made ready for battle with the Black Ones. For three days they fought, but a new weapon of the Black Ones won the day, and the chief of the Black Ones set up this throne of jet as proof of his power. Since, however, the Black Ones were not happy in the Caverns, longing for the darkness of their caves, they soon withdrew and we, the Folk, came forth again.

"But now the time has come when the dark ones will sacrifice the Daughter to their evil. If you can win her free, outlander, they shall perish as if they had not been."

"What of the Ancient Ones?" asked Garin—"those others Thran said would be saved?"

"Of those we know nothing save that when we bore the bodies of the fallen to the Place of Ancestors there were some missing. That you may see the truth of this story, Urg will take you to the gallery above the Room of Pleasant Death and you may look upon those who sleep there."

Urg guiding, Garin climbed a steep ramp leading from the Hall of Thrones. This led to a narrow balcony, one side of which was clear crystal. Urg pointed down.

They were above a long room whose walls were tinted jade green. On the polished floor were scattered piles of cushions. Each was occupied by a sleeping woman and several of these clasped a child in their arms. Their long hair rippled to the floor, their curved lashes made dark shadows on pale faces.

"But they are sleeping!" protested Garin.

Urg shook his head. "It is the sleep of death. Twice each ten hours vapors rise from the floor. Those breathing them do not wake again, and if they are undisturbed they will lie thus for a thousand years. Look there—"

He pointed to the closed double doors of the room. There lay the first men of the Ancient Ones Garin had seen. They, too, seemed but asleep, their handsome heads pillowed on their arms.

"Thran ordered those who remained after the last battle in the Hall of Thrones to enter the Room of Pleasant Death that the Black Ones might not torture them for their beastly pleasures. Thran himself remained behind to close the door, and so died."

There were no aged among the sleepers. None of the men seemed to count

more than thirty years and many of them appeared younger. Garin remarked upon this.

"The Ancient Ones appeared thus until the day of their death, though many lived twice a hundred years. The light rays kept them so. Even we of the Folk can hold back age. But come now, our Lord Trar would speak with you again."

CHAPTER FIVE

Into the Caves of Darkness

Again Garin stood before the jade throne of Trar and heard the stirring of the multitude of the Folk in the shadows. Trar was turning a small rod of glittering, greenish metal around in his soft hands.

"Listen well, outlander," he began, "for little time remains to us. Within seven days the Great Mists will be upon us. Then no living thing may venture forth from shelter and escape death. And before that time Thrala must be out of the Caves. This rod will be your weapon; the Black Ones have not its secret. Watch."

Two of the Folk dragged an ingot of metal before him. He touched it with the rod. Great flakes of rust appeared to spread across the entire surface. It crumpled away and one of the Folk trod upon the pile of dust where it had been.

"Thrala lies in the heart of the Caves but Kepta's men have grown careless with the years. Enter boldly and trust to fortune. They know nothing of your coming or of Thran's words concerning you."

Urg stood forward and held out his hands in appeal.

"What would you, Urg?"

"Lord, I would go with the outlander. He knows nothing of the Forest of the Morgels or of the Pool of Mud. It is easy to go astray in the woodland—"

Trar shook his head. "That may not be. He must go alone, even as Thran said."

The Ana, which had followed in Garin's shadow all day, whistled shrilly and stood on tiptoe to tug at his hand. Trar smiled. "That one may go, its eyes may serve you well. Urg will guide you to the outer portal of the Place of Ancestors and set you upon the road to the Caves. Farewell, outlander, and may the spirits of the Ancient Ones be with you."

Garin bowed to the ruler of the Folk and turned to follow Urg. Near the door stood a small group of women. Sera pressed forward from them, holding out a small bag.

"Outlander," she said hurriedly, "when you look upon the Daughter speak to her of Sera, for I have awaited her many years."

He smiled. "That I will."

"If you remember, outlander. I am a great lady among the Folk and have my share of suitors, yet I think I could envy the Daughter. Nay, I shall not explain

that," she laughed mockingly. "You will understand in due time. Here is a packet of food. Now go swiftly that we may have you among us again before the Mists."

So a woman's farewell sped them on their way. Urg chose a ramp which led downward. At its foot was a niche in the rock, above which a rose light burned dimly. Urg reached within the hollow and drew out a pair of high buskins which he aided Garin to lace on. They were a good fit, having been fashioned for a man of the Ancient Ones.

The passage before them was narrow and crooked. There was a thick carpet of dust underfoot, patterned by the prints of the Folk. They rounded a corner and a tall door loomed out of the gloom. Urg pressed the surface, there was a click and the stone rolled back.

"This is the Place of Ancestors," he announced as he stepped within.

They were at the end of a colossal hall whose domed roof disappeared into shadows. Thick pillars of gleaming crystal divided it into aisles, all leading inward to a raised dais of oval shape. Filling the aisles were couches and each soft nest held its sleeper. Near to the door lay the men and women of the Folk, but closer to the dais were the Ancient Ones. Here and there a couch bore a double burden, upon the shoulder of a man was pillowed the drooping head of a woman. Urg stopped beside such a one.

"See, outlander, here was one who was called from your world. Marena of the House of Light looked with favor upon him and their days of happiness were many."

The man on the couch had red-gold hair and on his upper arm was a heavy band of gold whose mate Garin had once seen in a museum. A son of pre-Norman Ireland. Urg traced with a crooked finger the archaic lettering carved upon the stone base of the couch.

"Lovers in the Light sleep sweetly. The Light returns on the appointed day."

"Who lies there?" Garin motioned to the dais.

"The first Ancient Ones. Come, look upon those who made this Tav."

On the dais the couches were arranged in two rows and between them, in the center, was a single couch raised above the others. Fifty men and women lay as if but resting for the hour, smiles on their peaceful faces but weary shadows beneath their eyes. There was an un-human quality about them which was lacking in their descendents.

Urg advanced to the high couch and beckoned Garin to join him. A man and a woman lay there, the woman's head upon the man's breast. There was that in their faces which made Garin turn away. He felt as if he had intruded roughly where no man should go.

"Here lies Thran, Son of Light, first Lord of the Caverns, and his lady Thrala, Dweller in the Light. So have they lain a thousand thousand years, and so will they

lie until this planet rots to dust beneath them. They led the Folk out of the slime and made Tav. Such as they we shall never see again."

They passed silently down the aisles of the dead. Once Garin caught sight of another fair-haired man, perhaps another outlander, since the Ancient Ones were all dark of hair. Urg paused once more before they left the hall. He stood by the couch of a man, wrapped in a long robe, whose face was ravaged with marks of agony.

Urg spoke a single name: "Thran."

So this was the last Lord of the Caverns. Garin leaned closer to study the dead face but Urg seemed to have lost his patience. He hurried his charge on to a panel door.

"This is the southern portal of the Caverns," he explained. "Trust to the Ana to guide you and beware of the boiling mud. Should the morgels scent you, kill quickly, they are the servants of the Black Ones. May fortune favor you, outlander."

The door was open and Garin looked out upon Tav. The soft blue light was as strong as it had been when he had first seen it. With the Ana perched on his shoulder, the green rod and the bag of food in his hands, he stepped out onto the moss sod.

Urg raised his hand in salute and the door clicked into place. Garin stood alone, pledged to bring the Daughter out of the Caves of Darkness.

There is no night or day in Tav since the blue light is steady. But the Folk divide their time by artificial means. However Garin, being newly come from the rays of healing, felt no fatigue. As he hesitated, the Ana chattered and pointed confidently ahead.

Before them was a dense wood of fern trees. It was quiet in the forest as Garin made his way into its gloom and for the first time he noted a peculiarity of Tav. There were no birds.

The portion of the woodland they had to traverse was but a spur of the forest to the west. After an hour of travel they came out upon the bank of a sluggish river. The turbid waters of the stream were a dull saffron color. This, thought Garin, must be the River of Gold, the boundary of the lands of the Black Ones.

He rounded a bend to come upon a bridge, so old that time itself had worn its stone angles into curves. The bridge gave on a wide plain where tall grass grew sere and yellow. To the left was a hissing and bubbling, and a huge wave of boiling mud arose in the air. Garin choked in a wind, thick with chemicals, which blew from it. He smelled and tasted the sulphur-tainted air all across the plain.

And he was glad enough to plunge into a small fern grove which half-concealed a spring. There he bathed his head and arms while the Ana pulled open Sera's food bag.

Together they ate the cakes of grain and the dried fruit. When they were done the Ana tugged at Garin's hand and pointed on.

Cautiously Garin wormed his way through the thick underbrush until, at last, he looked out into a clearing and at its edge the entrance of the Black Ones' Caves. Two tall pillars, carved into the likeness of foul monsters, guarded a rough-edged hole. A fine greenish mist whirled and danced in its mouth.

The flyer studied the entrance. There was no life to be seen. He gripped the destroying rod and inched forward. Before the green mist he braced himself and then stepped within.

CHAPTER SIX

Kepta's Second Prisoner

The green mist enveloped Garin. He drew into his lungs hot moist air faintly tinged with a scent of sickly sweetness, as from some hidden corruption. Green motes in the air gave forth little light and seemed to cling to the intruder.

With the Ana pattering before him, the American started down a steep ramp, the soft soles of his buskins making no sound. At regular intervals along the wall, niches held small statues. And about each perverted figure was a crown of green motes.

The Ana stopped, its large ears outspread as if to catch the faintest murmur of sound. From somewhere under the earth came the howls of a maddened dog. The Ana shivered, creeping closer to Garin.

Down led the ramp, growing narrower and steeper. And louder sounded the insane, coughing howls of the dog. Then the passage was abruptly barred by a grill of black stone. Garin peered through its bars at a flight of stairs leading down into a pit. From the pit arose snarling laughter.

Padding back and forth were things which might have been conceived by demons. They were sleek, rat-like creatures, hairless, and large as ponies. Red saliva dripped from the corners of their sharp jaws. But in the eyes, which they raised now and then toward the grill, there was intelligence. These were the morgels, watchdogs and slaves of the Black Ones.

From a second pair of stairs directly across the pit arose a moaning call. A door opened and two men came down the steps. The morgels surged forward, but fell back when whips were cracked over their heads.

The masters of the morgels were human in appearance. Black loin cloths were twisted about them and long, wing-shaped cloaks hung from their shoulders. On their heads, completely masking their hair, were cloth caps which bore ragged crests not unlike cockscombs. As far as Garin could see they were unarmed except for their whips.

A second party was coming down the steps. Between two of the Black Ones struggled a prisoner. He made a desperate and hopeless fight of it, but they dragged him to the edge of the pit before they halted. The morgels, intent upon their promised prey, crouched before them.

Five steps above were two figures to whom the guards looked for instructions. One was a man of their race, of slender, handsome body and evil, beautiful face. His hand lay possessively upon the arm of his companion.

It was Thrala who stood beside him, her head proudly erect. The laughter curves were gone from her lips; there was only sorrow and resignation to be read there now. But her spirit burned like a white flame in her eyes.

"Look!" her warder ordered. "Does not Kepta keep his promises? Shall we give Dandtan into the jaws of our slaves, or will you unsay certain words of yours, Lady Thrala?"

The prisoner answered for her. "Kepta, son of vileness, Thrala is not for you. Remember, beloved one," he spoke to the Daughter, "the day of deliverance is at hand—"

Garin felt a sudden emptiness. The prisoner had called Thrala "beloved" with the ease of one who had the right.

"I await Thrala's answer," Kepta returned evenly. And her answer he got.

"Beast among beasts, you may send Dandtan to his death, you may heap all manner of insult and evil upon me, but still I say the Daughter is not for your touch. Rather will I cut the line of life with my own hands, taking upon me the punishment of the Elder Ones. To Dandtan," she smiled down upon the prisoner, "I say farewell. We shall meet again beyond the Curtain of Time." She held out her hands to him.

"Thrala, dear one—!" One of his guards slapped a hand over the prisoner's mouth putting an end to his words.

But now Thrala was looking beyond him, straight at the grill which sheltered Garin. Kepta pulled at her arm to gain her attention. "Watch! Thus do my enemies die. To the pit with him!"

The guards twisted their prisoner around and the morgels crept closer, their eyes fixed upon that young, writhing body. Garin knew that he must take a hand in the game. The Ana was tugging him to the right, and there was an open archway leading to a balcony running around the side of the pit.

Those below were too entranced by the coming sport to notice the invader. But Thrala glanced up and Garin thought that she sighted him. Something in her attitude attracted Kepta, he too looked up. For a moment he stared in stark amazement, and then he thrust the Daughter through the door behind him.

"Ho, outlander! Welcome to the Caves. So the Folk have meddled—"

"Greeting, Kepta." Garin hardly knew whence came the words which fell so easily from his tongue. "I have come as was promised, to remain until the Black Throne is no more."

"Not even the morgels boast before their prey lies limp in their jaws," flashed Kepta. "What manner of beast are you?"

"A clean beast, Kepta, which you are not. Bid your two-legged morgels loose the youth, lest I grow impatient." The flyer swung the green rod into view.

Kepta's eyes narrowed but his smile did not fade. "I have heard of old that the Ancient Ones do not destroy—"

"As an outlander I am not bound by their limits," returned Garin, "as you will learn if you do not call off your stinking pack."

The master of the Caves laughed. "You are as the Tand, a fool without a brain. Never shall you see the Caverns again—"

"You shall own me master yet, Kepta."

The Black Chief seemed to consider. Then he waved to his men. "Release him," he ordered. "Outlander, you are braver than I thought. We might bargain—"

"Thrala goes forth from the Caves and the black throne is dust, those are the terms of the Caverns."

"And if we do not accept?"

"Then Thrala goes forth, the throne is dust and Tav shall have a day of judging such as it has never seen before."

"You challenge me?"

Again words, which seemed to Garin to have their origin elsewhere, came to him. "As in Yu-Lac, I shall take—"

Before Kepta could reply there was trouble in the pit. Dandtan, freed by his guards, was crossing the floor in running leaps. Garin threw himself belly down on the balcony and dropped the jeweled strap of his belt over the lip.

A moment later it snapped taut and he stiffened to an upward pull. Already Dandtan's heels were above the snapping jaws of a morgel. The flyer caught the youth around the shoulders and heaved. They rolled together against the wall.

"They are gone! All of them!" Dandtan cried, as he regained his feet. He was right; the morgels howled below, but Kepta and his men had vanished.

"Thrala!" Garin exclaimed.

Dandtan nodded. "They have taken her back to the cells. They believe her safe there."

"Then they think wrong." Garin stooped to pick up the green rod. His companion laughed.

"We'd best start before they get prepared for us."

Garin picked up the Ana. "Which way?"

Dandtan showed him a passage leading from behind the other door. Then he dodged into a side chamber to return with two of the wing cloaks and cloth hoods, so that they might pass as Black Ones.

They went by the mouths of three side tunnels, all deserted. None disputed their going. All the Black Ones had withdrawn from this part of the Caves.

Dandtan sniffed uneasily. "All is not well. I fear a trap."

"While we can pass, let us."

The passage curved to the right and they came into an oval room. Again Dandtan shook his head but ventured no protest. Instead he flung open a door and hurried down a short hall.

It seemed to Garin that there were strange rustlings and squeakings in the dark corners. Then Dandtan stopped so short that the flyer ran into him.

"Here is the guard room—and it is empty!"

Garin looked over his shoulder into a large room. Racks of strange weapons hung on the walls and the sleeping pallets of the guards were stacked evenly, but the men were nowhere to be seen.

They crossed the room and passed beneath an archway.

"Even the bars are not down," observed Dandtan. He pointed overhead. There hung a portcullis of stone. Garin studied it apprehensively. But Dandtan drew him on into a narrow corridor where were barred doors.

"The cells," he explained, and withdrew a bar across one door. The portal swung back and they pushed within.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Kepta's Trap

Thrala arose to face them. Forgetting the disguise he wore, Garin drew back, chilled by her icy demeanor. But Dandtan sprang forward and caught her in his arms. She struggled madly until she saw the face beneath her captor's hood, and then she gave a cry of delight and her arms were about his neck.

"Dandtan!"

He smiled. "Even so. But it is the outlander's doing."

She came to the American, studying his face. "Outlander? So cold a name is not for you, when you have served us so." She offered him her hands and he raised them to his lips.

"And how are you named?"

Dandtan laughed. "Thus the eternal curiosity of women!"

"Garin."

"Garin," she repeated. "How like—" A faint rose glowed beneath her pearl flesh.

Dandtan's hand fell lightly upon his rescuer's shoulder. "Indeed he is like him. From this day let him bear that other's name. Garan, Son of Light."

"Why not?" she returned calmly. "After all—"

"The reward which might have been Garan's may be his? Tell him the story of his namesake when we are again in the Caverns—"

Dandtan was interrupted by a frightened squeak from the Ana. Then came a mocking voice.

"So the prey has entered the trap of its own will. How many hunters may boast the same?"

Kepta leaned against the door, the light of vicious mischief dancing in his eyes. Garin dropped his cloak to the floor, but Dandtan must have read what was in the flyer's mind, for he caught him by the arm.

"On your life, touch him not!"

"So you have learned that much wisdom while you have dwelt among us, Dandtan? Would that Thrala had done the same. But fair women find me weak." He eyed her proud body in a way that would have sent Garin at his throat had Dandtan not held him. "So shall Thrala have a second chance. How would you like to see these men in the Room of Instruments, Lady?"

"I do not fear you," she returned. "Thran once made a prophecy, and he never spoke idly. We shall win free—"

"That will be as fate would have it. Meanwhile, I leave you to each other." He whipped around the door and slammed it behind him. They heard the grating of the bar he slid into place. Then his footsteps died away.

"There goes evil," murmured Thrala softly. "Perhaps it would have been better if Garin had killed him as he thought to do. We must get away...."

Garin drew the rod from his belt. The green light-motes gathered and clung about its polished length.

"Touch not the door," Thrala advised; "only its hinges."

Beneath the tip of the rod the stone became spongy and flaked away. Dandtan and the flyer caught the door and eased it to the floor. With one quick movement Thrala caught up Garin's cloak and swirled it about her, hiding the glitter of her gem-encrusted robe.

There was a curious cold lifelessness about the air of the corridor, the light-bearing motes vanishing as if blown out.

"Hurry!" the Daughter urged. "Kepta is withdrawing the living light, so that we will have to wander in the dark."

When they reached the end of the hall the light was quite gone, and Garin

bruised his hands against the stone portcullis which had been lowered. From somewhere on the other side of the barrier came rippling laughter.

"Oh, outlander," called Kepta mockingly, "you will get through easily enough when you remember your weapon. But the dark you can not conquer so easily, nor that which runs the halls."

Garin was already busy with the rod. Within five minutes their way was clear again. But Thrala stopped them when they would have gone through. "Kepta has loosed the hunters."

"The hunters?"

"The morgels and—others," explained Dandtan. "The Black Ones have withdrawn and only death comes this way. And the morgels see in the dark...."

"So does the Ana."

"Well thought of," agreed the son of the Ancient Ones.

"It will lead us out."

As if in answer, there came a tug at Garin's belt. Reaching back, he caught Thrala's hand and knew that she had taken Dandtan's. So linked they crossed the guard room. Then the Ana paused for a long time, as if listening. There was nothing to see but the darkness which hung about them like the smothering folds of a curtain.

"Something follows us," whispered Dandtan.

"Nothing to fear," stated Thrala. "It dare not attack. It is, I think, of Kepta's fashioning. And that which has not true life dreads death above all things. It is going—"

There came sounds of something crawling slowly away.

"Kepta will not try that again," continued the Daughter, disdainfully. "He knew that his monstrosities would not attack. Only in the light are they to be dreaded—and then only because of the horror of their forms."

Again the Ana tugged at its master's belt. They shuffled into the narrow passage beyond. But there remained the sense of things about them in the dark, things which Thrala continued to insist were harmless and yet which filled Garin with loathing.

Then they entered the far corridor into which led the three halls and which ended in the morgel pit. Here, Garin believed, was the greatest danger from the morgels.

The Ana stopped short, dropping back against Garin's thigh. In the blackness appeared two yellow disks, sparks of saffron in their depths. Garin thrust the rod into Thrala's hands.

"What do you?" she demanded.

"I'm going to clear the way. It's too dark to use the rod against moving crea-

tures....'' He flung the words over his shoulder as he moved toward the unwinking eyes.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Escape from the Caves

Keeping his eyes upon those soulless yellow disks, Garin snatched off his hood, wadding it into a ball. Then he sprang. His fingers slipped on smooth hide, sharp fangs ripped his forearm, blunt nails scraped his ribs. A foul breath puffed into his face and warm slaver trickled down his neck and chest. But his plan succeeded.

The cap was wedged into the morgel's throat and the beast was slowly choking. Blood dripped from the flyer's torn flesh, but he held on grimly until he saw the light fade from those yellow eyes. The dying morgel made a last mad plunge for freedom, dragging his attacker along the rock floor. Then Garin felt the heaving body rest limply against his own. He staggered against the wall, panting.

''Garin!'' cried Thrala. Her questing hand touched his shoulder and crept to his face. ''It is well with you?''

''Yes,'' he panted, ''let us go on.''

Thrala's fingers had lingered on his arm and now she walked beside him, her cloak making whispering sounds as it brushed against the wall and floor.

''Wait,'' she cautioned suddenly. ''The morgel pit....''

Dandtan slipped by them. ''I will try the door.''

In a moment he was back. ''It is open,'' he whispered.

''Kepta believes,'' mused Thrala, ''that we will keep to the safety of the gallery. Therefore let us go through the pit. The morgels will be gone to better hunting grounds.''

Through the pit they went. A choking stench arose from underfoot and they trod very carefully. They climbed the stairs on the far side unchallenged, Dandtan leading.

''The rod here, Garin,'' he called; ''this door is barred.''

Garin pressed the weapon into the other's hand and leaned against the rock. He was sick and dizzy. The long, deep wounds on his arm and shoulder were stiffening and ached with a biting throb.

When they went on he panted with effort. They still moved in darkness and his distress passed unnoticed.

''This is wrong,'' he muttered, half to himself. ''We go too easily—''

And he was answered out of the blackness. ''Well noted, outlander. But you go free for the moment, as does Thrala and Dandtan. Our full accounting is not yet. And now, farewell, until we meet again in the Hall of Thrones. I could find it in me to applaud your courage, outlander. Perhaps you will come to serve me yet.''

Garin turned and threw himself toward the voice, bringing up with bruising force against rock wall. Kepta laughed.

"Not with the skill of the bull Tand will you capture me."

His second laugh was cut cleanly off, as if a door had been closed. In silence the three hurried up the ramp. Then, as through a curtain, they came into the light of Tav.

Thrala let fall her drab cloak, stood with arms outstretched in the crater land. Her sparkling robe sheathed her in glory and she sang softly, rapt in her own delight. Then Dandtan put his arm about her; she clung to him, staring about as might a beauty-bewildered child.

Garin wondered dully how he would be able to make the journey back to the Caverns when his arm and shoulder were eaten with a consuming fire. The Ana crept closer to him, peering into his white face.

They were aroused by a howl from the Caves. Thrala cried out and Dandtan answered her unspoken question. "They have set the morgels on our trail!"

The howl from the Caves was echoed from the forest. Morgels before and behind them! Garin might set himself against one, Dandtan another, and Thrala could defend herself with the rod, but in the end the pack would kill them.

"We shall claim protection from the Gibi of the cliff. By the law they must give us aid," said Thrala, as, turning up her long robe, she began to run lightly. Garin picked up her cloak and drew it across his shoulder to hide his welts. When he could no longer hold her pace she must not guess the reason for his falling behind.

Of that flight through the forest the flyer afterward remembered little. At last the gurgle of water broke upon his pounding ears, as he stumbled along a good ten lengths behind his companions. They had come to the edge of the wood along the banks of the river.

Without hesitation Thrala and Dandtan plunged into the oily flood, swimming easily for the other side. Garin dropped the cloak, wondering if, once he stepped into the yellow stream, he would ever be able to struggle out again. Already the Ana was in, paddling in circles near the shore and pleading with him to follow. Wearily Garin waded out.

The water, which washed the blood and sweat from his aching body, was faintly brackish and stung his wounds to life. He could not fight the sluggish current and it bore him downstream, well away from where the others landed.

But at last he managed to win free, crawling out near where a smaller stream joined the river. There he lay panting, face down upon the moss. And there they found him, water dripping from his bedraggled finery, the Ana stroking his muddied hair. Thrala cried out with concern and pillowed his head on her knees while Dandtan examined his wounds.

"Why did you not tell us?" demanded Thrala.

He did not try to answer, content to lie there, her arms supporting him. Dandtan disappeared into the forest, returning soon, his hands filled with a mass of crushed leaves. With these he plastered Garin's wounds.

"You'd better go on," Garin warned.

Dandtan shook his head. "The morgels can not swim. If they cross, they must go to the bridge, and that is half the crater away."

The Ana dropped into their midst, its small hands filled with clusters of purple fruit. And so they feasted, Garin at ease on a fern couch, accepting food from Thrala's hand.

There seemed to be some virtue in Dandtan's leaf plaster for, after a short rest, Garin was able to get to his feet with no more than a twinge or two in his wounds. But they started on at a more sober pace. Through mossy glens and sunlit glades where strange flowers made perfume, the trail led. The stream they followed branched twice before, on the edge of meadow land, they struck away from the guiding water toward the crater wall.

Suddenly Thrala threw back her head and gave a shrill, sweet whistle. Out of the air dropped a yellow and black insect, as large as a hawk. Twice it circled her head and then perched itself on her outstretched wrist.

Its swollen body was jet black, its curving legs, three to a side, chrome yellow. The round head ended in a sharp beak and it had large, many-faceted eyes. The wings, which lazily tested the air, were black and touched with gold.

Thrala rubbed the round head while the insect nuzzled affectionately at her cheek. Then she held out her wrist again and it was gone.

"We shall be expected now and may pass unmolested."

Shortly they became aware of a murmuring sound. The crater wall loomed ahead, dwarfing the trees at its base.

"There is the city of the Gibi," remarked Dandtan.

Clinging to the rock were the towers and turrets of many eight-sided cells.

"They are preparing for the Mists," observed Thrala. "We shall have company on our journey to the Caverns."

They passed the trees and reached the foot of the wax skyscrapers which towered dizzily above their heads. A great cloud of the Gibi hovered about them. Garin felt the soft brush of their wings against his body. And they crowded each other jealously to be near Thrala.

The soft hush-hush of their wings filled the clearing as one large Gibi of outstanding beauty approached. The commoners fluttered off and Thrala greeted the Queen of the cells as an equal. Then she turned to her companions with the information the Gibi Queen had to offer.

"We are just in time. Tomorrow the Gibi leave. The morgels have crossed the river and are out of control. Instead of hunting us they have gone to ravage the forest lands. All Tav has been warned against them. But they may be caught by the Mist and so destroyed. We are to rest in the cliff hollows, and one shall come for us when it is time to leave."

The Gibi withdrew to the cell-combs after conducting their guests to the rock-hollows.

CHAPTER NINE

Days of Preparation

Garin was awakened by a loud murmuring. Dandtan knelt beside him.

"We must go. Even now the Gibi seal the last of the cells."

They ate hurriedly of cakes of grain and honey, and, as they feasted, the Queen again visited them. The first of the swarm were already winging eastward.

With the Gibi nation hanging like a storm cloud above them, the three started off across the meadow. The purple-blue haze was thickening and, here and there, curious formations, like the dust devils of the desert, arose and danced and disappeared again. The tropic heat of Tav increased; it was as if the ground itself were steaming.

"The Mists draw close; we must hurry," panted Dandtan.

They traversed the tongue of forest which bordered the meadow and came to the central plain of Tav. There was a brooding stillness there. The Ana, perched on Garin's shoulder, shivered.

Their walk became a trot; the Gibi bunched together. Once Thrala caught her breath in a half sob.

"They are flying slowly because of us. And it's so far—"

"Look!" Dandtan pointed at the plain. "The morgels!"

The morgel pack, driven by fear, ran in leaping bounds. They passed within a hundred yards of the three, yet did not turn from their course, though several snarled at them.

"They are already dead," observed Dandtan. "There is no time for them to reach the shelter of the Caves."

Splashing through a shallow brook, the three began to run. For the first time Thrala faltered and broke pace. Garin thrust the Ana into Dandtan's arms and, before she could protest, swept the girl into his arms.

The haze was denser now, settling upon them as a curtain. Black hair, finer than silk, whipped across Garin's throat. Thrala's head was on his shoulder, her heaving breasts arched as she gasped the sultry air.

"They—keep—watch...!" shouted Dandtan.

Piercing the gloom were pin-points of light. A dark shape grazed Garin's head—one of the Gibi Queen's guards.

Then abruptly they stumbled into a throng of the Folk, one of whom reached for Thrala with a crooning cry. It was Sera welcoming her mistress.

Thrala was borne away by the women, leaving Garin with a feeling of desolation.

"The Mists, Outlander." It was Urg, pointing toward the Cavern mouth. Two of the Folk swung their weight on a lever. Across the opening a sheet of crystal clicked into place. The Caverns were sealed.

The haze was now inky black outside and billows of it beat against the protecting barrier. It might have been midnight of the blackest, starless night.

"So will it be for forty days. What is without—dies," said Urg.

"Then we have forty days in which to prepare," Garin spoke his thought aloud. Dandtan's keen face lightened.

"Well said, Garin. Forty days before Kepta may seek us. And we have much to do. But first, our respects to the Lord of the Folk."

Together they went to the Hall of Thrones where, when he saw Dandtan, Trar arose and held out his jade-tipped rod of office. The son of the Ancient Ones touched it.

"Hail! Dweller in the Light, and Outlander who has fulfilled the promise of Thran. Thrala is once more within the Caverns. Now send you to dust this black throne...."

Garin, nothing loath, drew the destroying rod from his belt, but Dandtan shook his head. "The time is not yet, Trar. Kepta must finish the pattern he began. Forty days have we and then the Black Ones come."

Trar considered thoughtfully. "So that be the way of it. Thran did not see another war...."

"But he saw an end to Kepta!"

Trar straightened as if some burden had rolled from his thin shoulders. "Well do you speak, Lord. When there is one to sit upon the Rose Throne, what have we to fear? Listen, O ye Folk, the Light has returned to the Caverns!"

His cry was echoed by the gathering of the Folk.

"And now, Lord—" he turned to Dandtan with deference—"what are your commands?"

"For the space of one sleep I shall enter the Chamber of Renewing with this outlander, who is no longer an outlander but one, Garin, accepted by the Daughter according to the Law. And while we rest let all be made ready...."

"The Dweller in the Light has spoken!" Trar himself escorted them from the Hall.

They came, through many winding passages, to a deep pool of water, in the depths of which lurked odd purple shadows. Dandtan stripped and plunged in, Garin following his example. The water was tinglingly alive and they did not linger in it long. From it they went to a bubble room such as the one Garin had rested in after the bath of light rays, and on the cushions in its center stretched their tired bodies.

When Garin awoke he experienced the same exultation he had felt before. Dandtan regarded him with a smile. "Now to work," he said, as he reached out to press a knob set in the wall.

Two of the Folk appeared, bringing with them clean trappings. After they dressed and broke their fast, Dandtan started for the laboratories. Garin would have gone with him, but Sera intercepted them.

"There is one would speak with Lord Garin...."

Dandtan laughed. "Go," he ordered the American. "Thrala's commands may not be slighted."

The Hall of Women was deserted. And the corridor beyond, roofed and walled with slabs of rose-shot crystal, was as empty. Sera drew aside a golden curtain and they were in the audience chamber of the Daughter.

A semi-circular dais of the clearest crystal, heaped with rose and gold cushions, faced them. Before it, a fountain, in the form of a flower nodding on a curved stem, sent a spray of water into a shallow basin. The walls of the room were divided into alcoves by marble pillars, each one curved in semblance of a fern frond.

From the domed ceiling, on chains of twisted gold, seven lamps, each wrought from a single yellow sapphire, gave soft light. The floor was a mosaic of gold and crystal.

Two small Anas, who had been playing among the cushions, pattered up to exchange greetings with Garin's. But of the mistress of the chamber there was no sign. Garin turned to Sera, but before he could phrase his question, she asked mockingly:

"Who is the Lord Garin that he can not wait with patience?" But she left in search of the Daughter.

Garin glanced uneasily about the room. This jeweled chamber was no place for him. He had started toward the door when Thrala stepped within.

"Greetings to the Daughter." His voice sounded formal and cold, even to himself.

Her hands, which had been outheld in welcome, dropped to her sides. A ghost of a frown dimmed her beauty.

"Greetings, Garin," she returned slowly.

"You sent for me—" he prompted, eager to escape from this jewel box and

the unattainable treasure it held.

"Yes," the coldness of her tone was an order of exile. "I would know how you fared and whether your wounds yet troubled you."

He looked down at his own smooth flesh, cleanly healed by the wisdom of the Folk. "I am myself again and eager to be at such work as Dandtan can find for me...."

Her robe seemed to hiss across the floor as she turned upon him. "Then go!" she ordered. "Go quickly!"

And blindly he obeyed. She had spoken as if to a servant, one whom she could summon and dismiss by whim. Even if Dandtan held her love, she might have extended him her friendship. But he knew within him that friendship would be a poor crumb beside the feast his pulses pounded for.

There was a pattering of feet behind him. So, she would call him back! His pride sent him on. But it was Sera. Her head thrust forward until she truly resembled a reptile.

"Fool! Morgel!" she spat. "Even the Black Ones did not treat her so. Get you out of the Place of Women lest they divide your skin among them!"

Garin broke free, not heeding her torrent of reproach. Then he seized upon one of the Folk as a guide and sought the laboratories. Far beneath the surface of Tav, where the light-motes shone ghostly in the gloom, they came into a place of ceaseless activity, where there were tables crowded with instruments, coils of glass and metal tubing, and other equipment and supplies. These were the focusing point for ceaseless streams of the Folk. On a platform at the far end, Garin saw the tall son of the Ancient Ones working on a framework of metal and shining crystal.

He glanced up as Garin joined him. "You are late," he accused. "But your excuse is a good one. Now get you to work. Hold this here—and here—while I fasten these clamps."

So Garin became extra hands and feet for Dandtan, and they worked feverishly to build against the lifting of the Mists. There was no day or night in the laboratories. They worked steadily without rest, and without feeling fatigue.

Twice they went to the Chamber of Renewing, but except for these trips to the upper ways they were not out of the laboratories through all those days. Of Thrala there was no sign, nor did any one speak of her.

The Cavern dwellers were depending upon two defenses: an evil green liquid, to be thrown in frail glass globes, and a screen charged with energy. Shortly before the lifting of the Mists, these arms were transported to the entrance and installed there. Dandtan and Garin made a last inspection.

"Kepta makes the mistake of under-rating his enemies," Dandtan reflected,

feeling the edge of the screen caressingly. "When I was captured, on the day my people died, I was sent to the Black Ones' laboratories so that their seekers after knowledge might learn the secrets of the Ancient Ones. But I proved a better pupil than teacher and I discovered the defense against the Black Fire. After I had learned that, Kepta grew impatient with my supposed stupidity and tried to use me to force Thrala to his will. For that, as for other things, shall he pay—and the paying will not be in coin of his own striking. Let us think of that...." He turned to greet Urg and Trar and the other leaders of the Folk, who had approached unnoticed.

Among them stood Thrala, her gaze fixed upon the crystal wall between them and the thinning Mist. She noticed Garin no more than she did the Anas playing with her train and the women whispering behind her. But Garin stepped back into the shadows—and what he saw was not weapons of war, but cloudy black hair and graceful white limbs veiled in splendor.

Urg and one of the other chieftains bore down upon the door lever. With a protesting squeak, the glass wall disappeared into the rock. The green of Tav beckoned them out to walk in its freshness; it was renewed with lusty life. But in all that expanse of meadow and forest there was a strange stillness.

"Post sentries," ordered Dandtan. "The Black Ones will come soon."

He beckoned Garin forward as he spoke to Thrala:

"Let us go to the Hall of Thrones."

But the Daughter did not answer his smile. "It is not meet that we should spend time in idle talk. Let us go instead to call upon the help of those who have gone before us." So speaking, she darted a glance at Garin as chill as the arctic lands beyond the lip of Tav, and then swept away with Sera bearing her train.

Dandtan stared at Garin. "What has happened between you two?"

The flyer shook his head. "I don't know. No man is born with an understanding of women—"

"But she is angered with you. What has happened?"

For a moment Garin was tempted to tell the truth: that he dared not break any barrier she chose to raise, lest he seize what in honor was none of his. But he shook his head mutely. Neither of them saw Thrala again until Death entered the Caverns.

CHAPTER TEN

Battle and Victory

Garin stood with Dandtan looking out into the plain of Tav. Some distance away were two slender, steel-tipped towers, which were, in reality, but hollow tubes filled with the Black Fire. Before these dark-clad figures were busy.

"They seem to believe us already defeated. Let them think so," commented Dandtan, touching the screen they had erected before the Cavern entrance.

As he spoke Kepta swaggered through the tall grass to call a greeting:

"Ho, rock dweller, I would speak with you—"

Dandtan edged around the screen, Garin a pace behind.

"I see you, Kepta."

"Good. I trust that your ears will serve you as well as your eyes. These are my terms: Give Thrala to me to dwell in my chamber and the outlander to provide sport for my captains. Make no resistance but throw open the Caverns so that I may take my rightful place in the Hall of Thrones. Do this and we shall be at peace...."

"And this is our reply:"—Dandtan stood unmovingly before the screen—"Return to the Caves; break down the bridge between your land and ours. Let no Black One come hither again, ever...."

Kepta laughed. "So, that be the way of it! Then this shall we do: take Thrala, to be mine for a space, and then to go to my captains—"

Garin hurled himself forward, felt Kepta's lips mash beneath his fist; his fingers were closing about the other's throat as Dandtan, who was trying to pull him away from his prey, shouted a warning: "Watch out!"

A morgel had leaped from the grass, its teeth snapping about Garin's wrist, forcing him to drop Kepta. Then Dandtan laid it senseless by a sharp blow with his belt.

On hands and knees Kepta crawled back to his men. The lower part of his face was a red and dripping smear. He screamed an order with savage fury.

Dandtan drew the still raging flyer behind the screen. "Be a little prudent," he panted. "Kepta can be dealt with in other ways than with bare hands."

The towers were swinging their tips toward the entrance. Dandtan ordered the screen wedged tightly into place.

Outside, the morgel Dandtan had stunned got groggily to its feet. When it had limped half the distance back to its master, Kepta gave the order to fire. The broad beam of black light from the tip of the nearest tower caught the beast head on. There was a chilling scream of agony, and where the morgel had stood gray ashes drifted on the wind.

A hideous crackling arose as the black beam struck the screen. Green grass beneath seared away, leaving only parched earth and naked blue soil. Those within the Cavern crouched behind their frail protection, half blinded by the light from the seared grass, coughing from the chemical-ridden fumes which curled about the cracks of the rock.

Then the beam faded out. Thin smoke plumed from the tips of the towers, steam

arose from the blackened ground. Dandtan drew a deep breath.

"It held!" he cried, betraying at last the fear which had ridden him.

Men of the Folk dragged engines of tubing before the screen, while others brought forth the globes of green liquid. Dandtan stood aside, as if this matter were the business of the Folk alone, and Garin recalled that the Ancient Ones were opposed to the taking of life.

Trar was in command now. At his orders the globes were posed on spoon-shaped holders. Loopholes in the screen clicked open. Trar brought down his hand in signal. The globes arose lazily, sliding through the loopholes and floating out toward the towers.

One, aimed short, struck the ground where the fire had burned it bare, and broke. The liquid came forth, sluggishly, forming a gray-green gas as the air struck it. Another spiral of gas arose almost at the foot of one of the towers—and then another ... and another.

There quickly followed a tortured screaming, which soon dwindled to a weak yammering. They could see shapes, no longer human or animal, staggering about in the fog.

Dandtan turned away, his face white with horror. Garin's hands were over his ears to shut out that crying.

At last it was quiet; there was no more movement by the towers. Urg placed a sphere of rosy light upon the nearest machine and flipped it out into the camp of the enemy. As if it were a magnet it drew the green tendrils of gas, to leave the air clear. Here and there lay shrunken, livid shapes, the towers brooding over them.

One of the Folk burst into their midst, a woman of Thrala's following.

"Haste!" She clawed at Garin. "Kepta takes Thrala!"

She ran wildly back the way she had come, with the American pounding at her heels. They burst into the Hall of Thrones and saw a struggling group before the dais.

Garin heard someone howl like an animal, became aware the sound came from his own throat. For the second time his fist found its mark on Kepta's face. With a shriek of rage the Black One threw Thrala from him and sprang at Garin, his nails tearing gashes in the flyer's face. Twice the American twisted free and sent bone-crushing blows into the other's ribs. Then he got the grip he wanted, and his fingers closed around Kepta's throat. In spite of the Black One's struggles he held on until a limp body rolled beneath him.

Panting, the American pulled himself up from the blood-stained floor and grabbed the arm of the Jade Throne for support.

"Garin!" Thrala's arms were about him, her pitying fingers on his wounds. And in that moment he forgot Dandtan, forgot everything he had steeled himself

to remember. She was in his arms and his mouth sought hers possessively. Nor was she unresponsive, but yielded, as a flower yields to the wind.

"Garin!" she whispered softly. Then, almost shyly, she broke from his hold.

Beyond her stood Dandtan, his face white, his mouth tight. Garin remembered. And, a little mad with pain and longing, he dropped his eyes, trying not to see the loveliness which was Thrala.

"So, Outlander, Thrala flies to your arms—"

Garin whirled about. Kepta was hunched on the broad seat of the jet throne.

"No, I am not dead, Outlander—nor shall you kill me, as you think to do. I go now, but I shall return. We have met and hated, fought and died before—you and I. You were a certain Garan, Marshall of the air fleet of Yu-Lac on a vanished world, and I was Lord of Koom. That was in the days before the Ancient Ones pioneered space. You and I and Thrala, we are bound together and even fate can not break those bonds. Farewell, Garin. And do you, Thrala, remember the ending of that other Garan. It was not an easy one."

With a last malicious chuckle, he leaned back in the throne. His battered body slumped. Then the sharp lines of the throne blurred; it shimmered in the light. Abruptly then both it and its occupant were gone. They were staring at empty space, above which loomed the rose throne of the Ancient Ones.

"He spoke true," murmured Thrala. "We have had other lives, other meetings—so will we meet again. But for the present he returns to the darkness which sent him forth. It is finished."

Without warning, a low rumbling filled the Cavern; the walls rocked and swayed. Lizard and human, they huddled together until the swaying stopped. Finally a runner appeared with news that one of the Gibi had ventured forth and discovered that the Caves of Darkness had been sealed by an underground quake. The menace of the Black Ones was definitely at an end.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Thrala's Mate

Although there were falls of rock within the Caverns and some of the passages were closed, few of the Folk suffered injury. Gibi scouts reported that the land about the entrance to the Caves had sunk, and that the River of Gold, thrown out of its bed, was fast filling this basin to form a lake.

As far as they could discover, none of the Black Ones had survived the battle and the sealing of the Caves. But they could not be sure that there was not a handful of outlaws somewhere within the confines of Tav.

The Crater itself was changed. A series of raw hills had appeared in the central plain. The pool of boiling mud had vanished and trees in the forest lay flat, as

if cut by a giant scythe.

Upon their return to the cliff city, the Gibi found most of their wax skyscrapers in ruins, but they set about rebuilding without complaint. The squirrel farmers emerged from their burrows and were again busy in the fields.

Garin felt out of place in all the activity that filled the Caverns. More than ever he was the outlander with no true roots in Tav. Restlessly, he explored the Caverns, spending many hours in the Place of Ancestors, where he studied those men of the outer world who had preceded him into this weird land.

One night when he came back to his chamber he found Dandtan and Trar awaiting him there. There was a curious hardness in Dandtan's attitude, a somber sobriety in Trar's carriage.

"Have you sought the Hall of Women since the battle?" demanded the son of the Ancient Ones abruptly.

"No," retorted Garin shortly. Did Dandtan accuse him of double dealing?

"Have you sent a message to Thrala?"

Garin held back his rising temper. "I have not ventured where I can not."

Dandtan nodded to Trar as if his suspicions had been confirmed. "You see how it stands, Trar."

Trar shook his head slowly. "But never has the summoning been at fault—"

"You forget," Dandtan reminded him sharply. "It was once—and the penalty was exacted. So shall it be again."

Garin looked from one to the other, confused. Dandtan seemed possessed of a certain ruthless anger, but Trar was manifestly unhappy.

"It must come after council, the Daughter willing," the Lord of the Folk said.

Dandtan strode toward the door. "Thrala is not to know. Assemble the Council tonight. Meanwhile, see that he," he jerked his thumb toward Garin, "does not leave this room."

Thus Garin became a prisoner under the guard of the Folk, unable to discover of what Dandtan accused him, or how he had aroused the hatred of the Cavern ruler. Unless Dandtan's jealousy had been aroused and he was determined to rid himself of a rival.

Believing this, the flyer went willingly to the chamber where the judges waited. Dandtan sat at the head of a long table, Trar at his right hand and lesser nobles of the Folk beyond.

"You know the charge," Dandtan's words were tipped with venom as Garin came to stand before him. "Out of his own mouth has this outlander condemned himself. Therefore I ask that you decree for him the fate of that outlander of the second calling who rebelled against the summoning."

"The outlander has admitted his fault?" questioned one of the Folk.

Trar inclined his head sadly. "He did."

As Garin opened his mouth to demand a stating of the charge against him, Dandtan spoke again:

"What say you, Lords?"

For a long moment they sat in silence and then they bobbed their lizard heads in assent. "Do as you desire, Dweller in the Light."

Dandtan smiled without mirth. "Look, outlander." He passed his hand over the glass of the seeing mirror set in the table top. "This is the fate of him who rebels—"

In the shining surface Garin saw pictured a break in Tav's wall. At its foot stood a group of men of the Ancient Ones, and in their midst struggled a prisoner. They were forcing him to climb the crater wall. Garin watched him reach the lip and crawl over, to stagger across the steaming rock, dodging the scalding vapor of hot springs, until he pitched face down in the slimy mud.

"Such was his ending, and so will you end—"

The calm brutality of that statement aroused Garin's anger. "Rather would I die that way than linger in this den," he cried hotly. "You, who owe your life to me, would send me to such a death without even telling me of what I am accused. Little is there to choose between you and Kepta, after all—except that he was an open enemy!"

Dandtan sprang to his feet, but Trar caught his arm.

"He speaks fairly. Ask him why he will not fulfill the summoning."

While Dandtan hesitated, Garin leaned across the table, flinging his words, weapon-like, straight into that cold face.

"I'll admit that I love Thrala—have loved her since that moment when I saw her on the steps of the morgel pit in the caves. Since when has it become a crime to love that which may not be yours—if you do not try to take it?"

Trar released Dandtan, his golden eyes gleaming.

"If you love her, claim her. It is your right."

"Do I not know," Garin turned to him, "that she is Dandtan's. Thran had no idea of Dandtan's survival when he laid his will upon her. Shall I stoop to holding her to an unwelcome bargain? Let her go to the one she loves...."

Dandtan's face was livid, and his hands, resting on the table, trembled. One by one the lords of the Folk slipped away, leaving the two face-to-face.

"And I thought to order you to your death." Dandtan's whisper was husky as it emerged between dry lips. "Garin, we thought you knew—and, knowing, had refused her."

"Knew what?"

* * * * *

"That I am Thran's son—and Thrala's brother."

The floor swung beneath Garin's unsteady feet. Dandtan's hands were warm on his shoulders.

"I am a fool," said the American slowly.

Dandtan smiled. "A very honorable fool! Now get you to Thrala, who deserves to hear the full of this tangle."

So it was that, with Dandtan by his side, Garin walked for the second time down that hallway, to pass the golden curtains and stand in the presence of the Daughter. She came straight from her cushions into his arms when she read what was in his face. They needed no words.

And in that hour began Garin's life in Tav.

THE WHITE INVADERS

Out of their unknown fourth dimensional realm materializes a horde of White Invaders with power invincible.

CHAPTER I

A White Shape in the Moonlight

The colored boy gazed at Don and me with a look of terror.

"But I tell you I seen it!" he insisted. "An' it's down there now. A ghost! It's all white an' shinin'!"

"Nonsense, Willie," Don turned to me. "I say, Bob, what do you make of this?"

"I seen it, I tell you," the boy broke in. "It ain't a mile from here if you want to go look at it."

Don gripped the colored boy whose coffee complexion had taken on a greenish cast with his terror.

"Stop saying that, Willie. That's absolute rot. There's no such thing as a ghost."

"But I seen—"

"Where?"

"Over on the north shore. Not far."

"What did you see?" Don shook him. "Tell us exactly."

"A man! I seen a man. He was up on a cliff just by the golf course when I first seen him. I was comin' along the path down by the Fort Beach an' I looked up an' there he was, shinin' all white in the moonlight. An' then before I could run, he came floatin' down at me."

"Floating?"

"Yes. He didn't walk. He came down through the rocks. I could see the rocks of the cliff right through him."

Don laughed at that. But neither he nor I could set this down as utter nonsense, for within the past week there had been many wild stories of ghosts among the

colored people of Bermuda. The Negroes of Bermuda are not unduly superstitious, and certainly they are more intelligent, better educated than most of their race. But the little islands, this past week, were echoing with whispered tales of strange things seen at night. It had been mostly down at the lower end of the comparatively inaccessible Somerset; but now here it was in our own neighborhood.

"You've got the fever, Willie," Don laughed. "I say, who told you you saw a man walking through rock?"

"Nobody told me. I seen him. It ain't far if you—"

"You think he's still there?"

"Maybe so. Mr. Don, he was standin' still, with his arms folded. I ran, an'—"

"Let's go see if he's there," I suggested. "I'd like to have a look at one of these ghosts."

* * * * *

But even as I lightly said it, a queer thrill of fear shot through me. No one can contemplate an encounter with the supernatural without a shudder.

"Right you are," Don exclaimed. "What's the use of theory? Can you lead us to where you saw him, Willie?"

"Ye-es, of course."

The sixteen-year-old Willie was shaking again. "W-what's that for, Mr. Don?"

Don had picked up a shotgun which was standing in a corner of the room.

"Ain't no—no use of that, Mr. Don."

"We'll take it anyway, Willie. Ready, Bob?"

A step sounded behind us. "Where are you going?"

It was Jane Dorrance, Don's cousin. She stood in the doorway. Her long, filmy white summer dress fell nearly to her ankles. Her black hair was coiled on her head. In her bodice was a single red poinsettia blossom. As she stood motionless, her small slight figure framed against the dark background of the hall, she could have been a painting of an English beauty save for the black hair suggesting the tropics. Her blue-eyed gaze went from Don to me, and then to the gun.

"Where are you going?"

"Willie saw a ghost." Don grinned. "They've come from Somerset, Jane. I say, one of them seems to be right here."

"Where?"

"Willie saw it down by the Fort Beach."

"To-night?"

"Yes. Just now. So he says, though it's all rot, of course."

"Oh," said Jane, and she became silent.

* * * * *

She appeared to be barring our way. It seemed to me, too, that the color had left her face, and I wondered vaguely why she was taking it so seriously. That was not like Jane: she was a level-headed girl, not at all the sort to be frightened by Negroes talking of ghosts.

She turned suddenly on Willie. The colored boy had been employed in the Dorrance household since childhood. Jane herself was only seventeen, and she had known Willie here in this same big white stone house, almost from infancy.

"Willie, what you saw, was it a—a man?"

"Yes," said the boy eagerly. "A man. A great big man. All white an' shinin'."

"A man with a hood? Or a helmet? Something like a queer-looking hat on his head, Willie?"

"Jane!" expostulated Don. "What do you mean?"

"I saw him—saw it," said Jane nervously.

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed. "You did? When? Why didn't you tell us?"

"I saw it last night." She smiled faintly. "I didn't want to add to these wild tales. I thought it was my imagination. I had been asleep—I fancy I was dreaming of ghosts anyway."

"You saw it—" Don prompted.

"Outside my bedroom window. Some time in the middle of the night. The moon was out and the—the man was all white and shining, just as Willie says."

"But your bedroom," I protested. "Good Lord, your bedroom is on the upper floor."

But Jane continued soberly, with a sudden queer hush to her voice, "It was standing in the air outside my window. I think it had been looking in. When I sat up—I think I had cried out, though none of you heard me evidently—when I sat up, it moved away; walked away. When I got to the window, there was nothing to see." She smiled again. "I decided it was all part of my dream. This morning—well, I was afraid to tell you because I knew you'd laugh at me. So many girls down in Somerset have been imagining things like that."

* * * * *

To me, this was certainly a new light on the matter. I think that both Don and I, and certainly the police, had vaguely been of the opinion that some very human trickster was at the bottom of all this. Someone, criminal or otherwise, against whom our shotgun would be efficacious. But here was level-headed Jane telling us of a man standing in mid-air peering into her second-floor bedroom, and then walking away. No trickster could accomplish that.

"Ain't we goin'?" Willie demanded. "I seen it, but it'll be gone."

"Right enough," Don exclaimed grimly. "Come on, Willie."

He disregarded Jane as he walked to the door, but she clung to him.

"I'm coming," she said obstinately, and snatched a white lace scarf from the hall rack and flung it over her head like a mantilla. "Don, may I come?" she added coaxingly.

He gazed at me dubiously. "Why, I suppose so," he said finally. Then he grinned. "Certainly no harm is going to come to us from a ghost. Might frighten us to death, but that's about all a ghost can do, isn't it?"

We left the house. The only other member of the Dorrance household was Jane's father—the Hon. Arthur Dorrance, M.P. He had been in Hamilton all day, and had not yet returned. It was about nine o'clock of an evening in mid-May. The huge moon rode high in a fleecy sky, illumining the island with a light so bright one could almost read by it.

"We'll walk," said Don. "No use riding, Willie."

"No. It's shorter over the hill. It ain't far."

* * * * *

We left our bicycles standing against the front veranda, and, with Willie and Don leading us, we plunged off along the little dirt road of the Dorrance estate. The poinsettia blooms were thick on both sides of us. A lily field, which a month before had been solid white with blossoms, still added its redolence to the perfumed night air. Through the branches of the squat cedar trees, in almost every direction there was water visible—deep purple this night, with a rippled sheen of silver upon it.

We reached the main road, a twisting white ribbon in the moonlight. We followed it for a little distance, around a corkscrew turn, across a tiny causeway where the moonlit water of an inlet lapped against the base of the road and the sea-breeze fanned us. A carriage, heading into the nearby town of St. Georges, passed us with the thud of horses' hoofs pounding on the hard smooth stone of the road. Under its jaunty canopy an American man reclined with a girl on each side of him. He waved us a jovial greeting as they passed.

Then Willie turned us off the road. We climbed the ramp of an open grassy field, with a little cedar woods to one side, and up ahead, half a mile to the right, the dark crumbling ramparts of a little ancient fort which once was for the defense of the island.

Jane and I were together, with Willie and Don in advance of us, and Don carrying the shotgun.

"You really saw it, Jane?"

"Oh, I don't know. I thought I did. Then I thought that I didn't."

"Well, I hope we see it now. And if it's human—which it must be if there's anything to it at all—we'll march it back to St. Georges and lock it up."

She turned and smiled at me, but it was a queer smile, and I must admit my

own feelings were queer.

"Don't you think you're talking nonsense, Bob?"

"Yes, I do," I admitted. "I guess maybe the whole thing is nonsense. But it's got the police quite worried. You knew that, didn't you? All this wild talk—there must be some basis for it."

Don was saying, "Take the lower path, Willie. Take the same route you were taking when you saw it."

* * * * *

We climbed down a steep declivity, shadowed by cedar trees, and reached the edge of a tiny, almost landlocked, lagoon. It was no more than a few hundred feet in diameter. The jagged, porous gray-black rocks rose like an upstanding crater rim to mark its ten-foot entrance to the sea. A little white house stood here with its back against the fifty-foot cliff. It was dark, its colored occupants probably already asleep. Two rowboats floated in the lagoon, moored near the shore. And on the narrow strip of stony beach, nets were spread to dry.

"This way, Mister Don. I was comin' along here, toward the Fort." Willie was again shaking with excitement. "Just past that bend."

"You keep behind me." Don led us now, with his gun half raised. "Don't talk when we get further along, and walk as quietly as you can."

The narrow path followed the bottom of the cliff. We presently had the open sea before us, with a line of reefs a few hundred yards out against which the lazy ground swell was breaking in a line of white. The moonlit water lapped gently at our feet. The cliff rose to our right, a mass of gray-black rock, pitted and broken, fantastically indented, unreal in the moonlight.

"I seen it—just about there," Willie whispered.

Before us, a little rock headland jutted out into the water. Don halted us, and we stood silent, gazing. I think that there is hardly any place more fantastic than a Bermuda shorefront in the moonlight. In these little eroded recesses, caves and grottoes one might expect to see crooked-legged gnomes, scampering to peer at the human intruder. Gnarled cedars, hanging precariously, might hide pixies and elves. A child's dream of fairyland, this reality of a Bermuda shorefront.

"There it is!"

* * * * *

Willie's sibilant whisper dispelled my roaming fancy. We all turned to stare behind us in the direction of Willie's unsteady finger. And we all saw it—the white shape of a man down near the winding path we had just traversed. A wild thrill of fear, excitement, revulsion—call it what you will—surged over me. The thing had been following us!

We stood frozen, transfixed. The shape was almost at the water level, a hun-

dred feet or so away. It had stopped its advance; to all appearances it was a man standing there, calmly regarding us. Don and I swung around to face it, shoving Jane and Willie behind us.

Willie had started off in terror, but Jane gripped him.

"Quiet, Willie!"

"There it is! See it—"

"Of course we see it," Don whispered. "Don't talk. We'll wait; see what it does."

We stood a moment. The thing was motionless. It was in a patch of shadow, but, as though gleaming with moonlight, it seemed to shine. Its glow was silvery, with a greenish cast almost phosphorescent. Was it standing on the path? I could not tell. It was too far away; too much in shadow. But I plainly saw that it had the shape of a man. Wraith, or substance? That also, was not yet apparent.

Then suddenly it was moving! Coming toward us. But not floating, for I could see the legs moving, the arms swaying. With measured tread it was walking slowly toward us!

Don's shotgun went up. "Bob, we'll hold our ground. Is it—is he armed, can you see?"

"No! Can't tell."

Armed! What nonsense! How could this wraith, this apparition, do us physical injury!

"If—if he gets too close, Bob, by God, I'll shoot. But if he's human, I wouldn't want to kill him."

* * * * *

The shape had stopped again. It was fifty feet from us now, and we could clearly see that it was a man, taller than normal. He stood now with folded arms—a man strangely garbed in what seemed a white, tight-fitting jacket and short trunks. On his head was a black skull cap surmounted by a helmet of strange design.

Don's voice suddenly echoed across the rocks.

"Who are you?"

The white figure gave no answer. It did not move.

"We see you. What do you want?" Don repeated.

Then it moved again. Partly toward us and partly sidewise, away from the sea. The swing of the legs was obvious. It was walking. But not upon the path, nor upon the solid surface of these Bermuda rocks! A surge of horror went through me at the realization. This was nothing human! It was walking on some other surface, invisible to us, but something solid beneath its own tread.

"Look!" Jane whispered. "It's walking—into the cliff!"

There was no doubt about it now. Within thirty feet of us, it was slowly walking

up what must have been a steep ascent. Already it was ten feet or more above our level. And it was behind the rocks of the cliff! Shining in there as though the rocks themselves were transparent!

Or were my senses tricking me? I whispered, "Is it back of the rocks? Or is there a cave over there? An opening?"

"Let's go see." Don took a step forward; and called again:

"You—we see you. Stand still! Do you want me to fire at you?"

The figure turned and again stood regarding us with folded arms. Obviously not Don's voice, but his movement, had stopped it. We left the path and climbed about ten feet up the broken cliff-side. The figure was at our level now, but it was within the rocks. We were close enough now to see other details: a man's white face, with heavy black brows, heavy features; a stalwart, giant figure, six and a half feet at the least. The white garment could have been of woven metal. I saw black, thread-like wires looped along the arms, over the shoulders, down the sides of the muscular naked legs. There seemed, at the waist, a dial-face, with wires running into it.

The details were so clear that they seemed substantial, real. Yet the figure was so devoid of color that it could have been a light-image projected here upon these rocks. And the contour of the cliff was plainly visible in front of it.

* * * * *

We stood gazing at the thing, and it stared back at us.

"Can you hear us?" Don called.

Evidently it could not. Then a sardonic smile spread over the face of the apparition. The lips moved. It said something to us, but we heard no sound.

It was a wraith—this thing so visibly real! It was apparently close to us, yet there was a limitless, intervening void of the unknown.

It stood still with folded arms across the brawny chest, sardonically regarding us. The face was strangely featured, yet wholly of human cast. And, above all, its aspect was strangely evil. Its gaze suddenly turned on Jane with a look that made my heart leap into my throat and made me fling up my arms as though to protect her.

Then seemingly it had contemplated us enough; the folded arms swung down; it turned away from us, slowly stalking off.

"Stop!" Don called.

"See!" I whispered. "It's coming out in the open!"

The invisible surface upon which it walked led it out from the cliff. The figure was stalking away from us in mid-air, and it seemed to fade slowly in the moonlight.

"It's going!" I exclaimed. "Don, it's getting away!"

Impulsively I started scrambling over the rocks; unreasoningly, for who can chase and capture a ghost?

Don stopped me. "Wait!" His shotgun went to his shoulders. The white shape was now again about fifty feet away. The gun blazed into the moonlight. The buckshot tore through the stalking white figure; the moonlit shorefront echoed with the shot.

When the smoke cleared away, we saw the apparition still walking quietly forward. Up over the sea now, up and out into the moonlit night, growing smaller and dimmer in the distance, until presently it was faded and gone.

A ghost?

We thought so then.

CHAPTER II

The Face at the Window

This was our first encounter with the white invaders. It was too real to ignore or treat lightly. One may hear tales of a ghost, even the recounting by a most reliable eye-witness, and smile skeptically. But to see one yourself—as we had seen this thing in the moonlight of that Bermuda shorefront—that is a far different matter.

We told our adventure to Jane's father when he drove in from Hamilton about eleven o'clock that same evening. But he, who personally had seen no ghost, could only look perturbed that we should be so deluded. Some trickster—or some trick of the moonlight, and the shadowed rocks aiding our own sharpened imaginations. He could think of no other explanation. But Don had fired pointblank into the thing and had not harmed it.

Arthur Dorrance, member of the Bermuda Parliament, was a gray-haired gentleman in his fifties, a typical British Colonial, the present head of this old Bermuda family. The tales or the ghosts, whatever their origin, already had forced themselves upon Governmental attention. All this evening, in Hamilton, Mr. Dorrance had been in conference trying to determine what to do about it. Tales of terror in little Bermuda had a bad enough local effect, but to have them spread abroad, to influence adversely the tourist trade upon which Bermuda's very existence depended—that presaged economic catastrophe.

"And the tales are spreading," he told us. "Look here, you young cubs, it's horribly disconcerting to have you of all people telling me a thing like this."

Even now he could not believe us. But he sat staring at us, eyeglasses in hand, with his untouched drink before him.

"We'll have to report it, of course. I've been all evening with the steamship officials. They're having cancellations." He smiled faintly at me. "We can't get

along without you Americans, Bob.''

I have not mentioned that I am an American. I was on vacation from my job as radio technician in New York. Don Livingston, who is English and three years my senior, was in a similar line of work—at this time he was technician in the small Bermuda broadcasting station located in the nearby town of St. Georges.

* * * * *

We talked until nearly midnight. Then the telephone rang. It was the Police Chief in Hamilton. Ghosts had been seen in that vicinity this evening. There were a dozen complaints of ghostly marauders prowling around homes. This time from both white and colored families.

And there was one outstanding fact, frightening, indeed, though at first we could not believe that it meant very much, or that it had any connection with this weird affair. In the residential suburb of Paget, across the harbor from Hamilton, a young white girl, named Miss Arton, had vanished. Mr. Dorrance turned from the telephone after listening to the details and faced us with white face and trembling hands, his expression more perturbed and solemn than ever before.

''It means nothing, of course. It cannot mean anything.''

''What, father?'' Jane demanded. ''Something about Eunice?''

''Yes. You know her, Bob—you played tennis down there with her last week. Eunice Arton.''

I remembered her. A Bermuda girl; a beauty, second to none in the islands, save perhaps Jane herself. Jane and Don had known her for years.

''She's missing,'' Mr. Dorrance added. He flashed us a queer look and we stared at him blankly. ''It means nothing, of course,'' he added. ''She's been gone only an hour.''

But we all knew that it did mean something. For myself I recall a chill of inward horror; a revulsion as though around me were pressing unknown things; unseeable, imponderable things menacing us all.

''Eunice missing! But father, how missing?''

He put his arm around Jane. ''Don't look so frightened, my dear child.''

He held her against him. If only all of us could have anticipated the events of the next few days. If only we could have held Jane, guarded her, as her father was affectionately holding her now!

* * * * *

Don exclaimed, ''But the Chief of Police gave you details?''

''There weren't many to give.'' He lighted a cigarette and smiled at his trembling hands. ''I don't know why I should feel this way, but I do. I suppose—well, it's what you have told me to-night. I don't understand it—I can't think it was all your imagination.''

"But that girl, Eunice," I protested.

"Nothing—except she isn't at home where she should be. At eleven o'clock she told her parents she was going to retire. Presumably she went to her room. At eleven-thirty her mother passed her door. It was ajar and a bedroom light was lighted. Mrs. Arton opened the door to say good night to Eunice. But the girl was not there."

He stared at us. "That's all. There is so much hysteria in the air now, that Mr. Arton was frightened and called upon the police at once. The Artons have been telephoning to everyone they know. It isn't like Eunice to slip out at night—or is it, Jane?"

"No," said Jane soberly. "And she's gone? They didn't hear any sound from her?" A strange, frightened hush came upon Jane's voice. "She didn't—scream from her bedroom? Anything like that?"

"No, he said not. Jane, dear, you're thinking more horrible things. She'll be found in the morning, visiting some neighbor or something of the kind."

But she was not found. Bermuda is a small place. The islands are so narrow that the ocean on both sides is visible from almost everywhere. It is only some twelve miles from St. Georges to Hamilton, and another twelve miles puts one in remote Somerset. By noon of the next day it was obvious that Eunice Arton was quite definitely missing.

* * * * *

This next day was May 15th—the first of the real terror brought by the White Invaders. But we did not call them that yet; they were still the "ghosts." Bermuda was seething with terror. Every police station was deluged with reports of the ghostly apparitions. The white figures of men—in many instances, several figures together—had been seen during the night in every part of the islands. A little band of wraiths had marched down the deserted main street of Hamilton. It was nearly dawn. A few colored men, three or four roistering visitors, and two policemen had seen them. They had appeared down at the docks and had marched up the slope of the main street.

The stories of eye-witnesses to any strange event always are contradictory. Some said this band of ghostly men marched on the street level; others said they were below it, walking with only their heads above the road surface and gradually descending. In any event the frightened group of onlookers scattered and shouted until the whole little street was aroused. But by then the ghosts had vanished.

There were tales of prowlers around houses. Dogs barked in the night, frantic with excitement, and then shivered with terror, fearful of what they could sense but not see.

In Hamilton harbor, moored at its dock, was a liner ready to leave for New

York. The deck watch saw ghosts walking apparently in mid-air over the moonlit bay, and claimed that he saw the white figure of a man pass through the solid hull-plates of the ship. At the Gibbs Hill Lighthouse other apparitions were seen; and the St. David Islanders saw a group of distant figures seemingly a hundred feet or more beneath the beach—a group, heedless of being observed; busy with some activity; dragging some apparatus, it seemed. They pulled and tugged at it, moving it along with them until they were lost to sight, faded in the arriving dawn and blurred by the white line of breakers on the beach over them.

The tales differed materially in details. But nearly all mentioned the dark helmets of strange design, the white, tightly fitting garments, and many described the dark thread-like wires looped along the arms and legs, running up into the helmet, and back across the chest to converge at the belt where there was a clock-like dial-face.

* * * * *

The ghostly visitors seemed not aggressive. But Eunice Arton was missing; and by noon of May 15th it was apparent that several other white girls had also vanished. All of them were under twenty, all of prominent Bermuda families, and all of exceptional beauty.

By this time the little government was in chaos. The newspapers, by government order, were suppressed. The cable station voluntarily refused to send press dispatches to the outside world. Don, Jane and I, through Mr. Dorrance's prominence, had all the reports; but to the public it was only known by whispered, garbled rumor. A panic was impending. The New York liner, that morning of May 15th, was booked beyond capacity. An English ship, anchored out in the open channel outside Hamilton harbor, received passengers up to its limit and sailed.

The shops of St. Georges and Hamilton did not open that morning of May 15th. People gathered in the streets—groups of whites and blacks—trying to learn what they could, and each adding his own real or fancied narrative to the chaos.

Although there had seemed so far no aggression from the ghosts—our own encounter with the apparition being typical of them all—shortly after noon of the 15th we learned of an event which changed the whole aspect of the affair; an event sinister beyond any which had gone before. It had occurred in one of the hotels near Hamilton the previous night and had been suppressed until now.

A young woman tourist, living alone in the hotel, had occupied a bedroom on the lower floor. The storm blinds and windows were open. During the night she had screamed. Guests in nearby rooms heard her cries, and they were also conscious of a turmoil in the woman's room. Her door was locked on the inside, and when the night clerk finally arrived with a pass-key and they entered, they found the room disordered, a wicker chair and table overturned, and the young woman gone, presumably out of the window. She had been a woman of about twenty-five,

a widow, exceptionally attractive.

* * * * *

Stolen by the ghosts? We could think of nothing else. Was that what had happened to Eunice Arton? Did that explain the reported disappearances of the several other girls? Did this ghostly activity have some rational purpose—the stealing of young white women, all of them of unusual beauty? The conclusion was forced upon us, and with it the whole affair took on a complexion shudderingly sinister. It was not a mere panic of the people with which Bermuda now had to cope—not merely an unexplainable supernatural visitation, harmless enough, save that it was terrorizing. This was a menace. Something which had to be met with action.

It would be futile for me to attempt detailing the events of that chaotic day. We had all ridden over to Hamilton and spent the day there, with the little town in a turmoil and events seething around us—a seemingly endless stream of reports of what had happened the night before. By daylight no apparitions were seen. But another night was coming. I recall with an inward sinking of heart I saw the afternoon sun lowering, the sky-blue waters of the bay deepening into purple and the chalk-white little stone houses taking on the gray cast of twilight. Another night was coming.

The government was making the best preparations it could. Every policeman of the island force was armed and ready to patrol through the night. The few soldiers of the garrisons at St. Georges and Hamilton were armed and ready. The police with bicycles were ready to ride all the roads. The half dozen garbage trucks—low-geared motor trucks—were given over to the soldiers for patrol use. The only other automobiles on the islands were those few permitted for the use of the physicians, and there were a few ambulance cars. All of these were turned over to the troops and the police for patrol.

* * * * *

In the late afternoon an American newspaper hydroplane arrived from New York. It landed in the waters of Hamilton harbor and prepared to encircle the islands throughout the night. And the three or four steamship tenders and the little duty boat which supplied the government dockyards with daily provisions all had steam up, ready to patrol the island waters.

Yet it all seemed so futile against this unknown enemy. Ghosts? We could hardly think of them now as that. Throughout the chaotic day I recall so many wild things I had heard others say, and had myself thought. The dead come to life as living wraiths? A ghost could not materialize and kidnap a girl of flesh and blood. Or could it? Hysterical speculation! Or were these invaders from another planet?

Whatever their nature, they were enemies. That much we knew.

Night fell upon the crowded turmoil of the little city of Hamilton. The streets

were thronged with excited, frightened people. The public park was jammed. The hotels and the restaurants were crowded. Groups of soldiers and police on bicycles with electric torches fastened to their handlebars were passing at intervals. Overhead the airplane, flying low, roared past every twenty minutes or so.

The night promised to be clear. The moon would rise, just beyond the full, a few hours after sunset. It was a warm and breathless night, with less wind than usual. Most of the people crowding the streets and the restaurants were in white linen—themselves suggesting the white and ghostly enemy.

* * * * *

Mr. Dorrance was occupied at the Government House. Jane, Don and I had supper in a restaurant on Queen Street. It was nearly eight o'clock and the crowd in the restaurant was thinning out. We were seated near the street entrance where large plate-glass windows displayed a variety of bakery products and confections. Jane had her back to the street, but Don and I were facing it. Crowds were constantly passing. It was near the end of our meal. I was gazing idly through one of the windows, watching the passing people when suddenly I became aware of a man standing out there gazing in at me. I think I have never had so startling a realization. It was a man in white doeskin trousers and blue blazer jacket, with a jaunty linen cap on his head. An abnormally tall, muscular man. And his smooth-shaven, black-browed face with the reflection from the restaurant window lights upon it, reminded me of the apparition we had seen the night before!

"Don! Don't look up! Don't move! Jane, don't look around!" I whispered, almost frantically.

I must have gone white for Don and Jane gaped at me in astonishment.

"Don't do that!" I murmured. "Someone outside, watching us!" I tried to smile. "Hot night, isn't it? Did you get a check, Don?" I looked around vaguely for the waitress, but out of the tail of my eyes I could see the fellow out there still peering in and staring intently at us.

"What is it?" Don whispered.

"Man watching us! See him out there—the right-hand window! Jane, don't look around!"

"Good Lord!" murmured Don.

"Looks like him, doesn't it?"

"Good Lord! But I say—"

"What is it?" murmured Jane. "What is it?"

"Waitress!" I called. "Check, please. There's a man out there, Jane—we're crazy, but he does look like that ghost we saw on the Fort Beach."

If the fellow knew that we had spotted him he gave no sign. He was still apparently regarding the bakery display in the window, but watching us nevertheless.

I was sure of that.

The waitress gave us our check. "Nine and six," Don smiled. "Thank you. But didn't you forget that last coffee?"

The colored girl added the extra sixpence, and left us.

"You think that's the same—I say, good Lord—"

* * * * *

Don was speechless. Jane had gone white. The fellow moved to the other window, and Jane had a swift look at him. We all recognized him, or thought we did. What necromancy was this? Had one of the apparitions materialized? Was that ghost we saw, this gigantic fellow in doeskins and blazer who looked like a tourist standing out there at the window? Were these ghosts merely human enemies after all?

The idea was at once terrifying, and yet reassuring. This was a man with whom we could cope with normal tactics. My hand went to the pocket of my blazer where I had a little revolver. Both Don and I were armed—permits for the carrying of concealed weapons had been issued to us this same day.

I murmured, "Jane! There are the Blakinsons over there. Go join them. We'll be back presently."

"What are you going to do?" Don demanded.

"Go out and tackle him—shall we? Have a talk. Find out who he is."

"No!" Jane protested.

"Why not? Don't you worry, Jane. Right here in the public street—and we're both armed. He's only a man."

But was he only a man?

"We'll have a go at it," said Don abruptly. He rose from his seat. "Come on, Jane, I'll take you to the Blakinsons."

"Hurry it up!" I said. "He's leaving! We'll lose him!"

The fellow seemed about to wander on along the street. Don brought Jane over to the Blakinsons' table which was at the back of the restaurant. We left our check with her and dashed for the street.

"Where is he? Do you see him?" Don demanded.

He had gone. But in a moment we saw him, his white cap towering above the crowd down by the drugstore at the corner.

"Come on, Don! There he is!"

We half ran through the crowd. We caught the fellow as he was diagonally crossing the street. We rushed up, one on each side of him, and seized him by the arms.

CHAPTER III

Tako, the Mysterious

The fellow towered head and shoulders over Don, and almost that over me. He stared down at us, his jaw dropping with surprise. My heart was pounding; to me there was no doubt about it now; this heavy-featured handsome, but evil face was the face of the apparition at whom Don had fired as it hung in the air over the Fort Beach path. But this was a man. His arm, as I clutched it, was muscularly solid beneath the sleeve of his flannel jacket.

"I say," Don panted. "Just a minute."

With a sweep of his arms the stranger angrily flung off our hold.

"What do you want?"

I saw, within twenty feet of us, a policeman standing in the street intersection.

"I beg your pardon," Don stammered. We had had no time to plan anything. I put in:

"We thought you were a friend of ours. This night—so much excitement—let's get back to the curb."

We drew the man to the sidewalk as a physician's little automobile with two soldiers in it waded its way slowly through the crowd.

The man laughed. "It is an exciting night. I never have seen Bermuda like this before."

Swift impressions flooded me. The fellow surely must recognize us as we did him. He was pretending friendliness. I noticed that though he seemed not over forty, his close-clipped hair beneath the white linen cap was silver white. His face had a strange pallor, not the pallor of ill health, but seemingly a natural lack of color. And his voice, speaking good English, nevertheless marked him for a foreigner—though of what nation certainly I could not say.

"We're mistaken," said Don. "But you look like someone we know."

"Do I, indeed? That is interesting."

"Only you're taller," I said. "You're not a Bermudian, are you?"

His eyes, beneath the heavy black brows shot me a look. "No. I am a stranger; a visitor. My name——"

* * * * *

He hesitated briefly; then he smiled with what seemed an amused irony. "My name is Tako. Robert Tako. I am living at the Hamiltonia Hotel. Does that satisfy you?"

I could think of nothing to say. Nor could Don. The fellow added, "Bermuda is like a little ship. I understand your inquisitiveness—one must know everyone else.

And who are you?''

Don told him.

''Ah, yes,'' he smiled. ''And so you are a native Bermudian?''

''Yes.''

''And you,'' he said to me, ''you are American?''

''From New York, yes.''

''That is more interesting. Never have I known an American. You are familiar with New York City?''

''Of course. I was born there.''

His contemplative gaze made me shiver. I wondered what Don was planning as an outcome to this. The fellow seemed wholly at ease now. He was lounging against the drug store window with us before him. My eyes were level with the negligee collar of his blue linen shirt, and abruptly I was galvanized into alertness. Just above the soft collar where his movements had crushed it down I saw unmistakably the loop of a tiny black thread of wire projecting upward! Conclusive proof! This was one of the mysterious enemies! One of the apparitions which had thrown all Bermuda into a turmoil stood materialized here before us.

I think that Don had already seen the wire. The fellow was saying nonchalantly,

''And you, Mr. Livingston—are you also familiar with New York City?''

''Yes,'' said Don. He had gone pale and tight-lipped. I caught his warning glance to me. ''Yes,'' he repeated. ''I lived there several years.''

''I would like to know you two better. Much better—but not tonight.''

He moved as though to take his leave of us. Then he added to Don, ''That most beautiful young lady with you in the restaurant—did I not see you there? Is that your sister?''

Don made his decision. He said abruptly, ''That's none of your business.''

It took the fellow wholly by surprise. ''But listen—''

''I've had enough of your insolence,'' Don shouted.

The man's hand made an instinctive movement toward his belt, but I seized his wrist. And I added my loud voice to Don's. ''No, you don't!''

* * * * *

A group of onlookers was at once collecting around us. The giant tried to cast me off, but I clung to him with all my strength. And suddenly we were struggling to keep the fellow from breaking away from us. He muttered a strange-sounding oath.

''Let me go! You fools!''

''Not such fools,'' Don shouted. ''Officer! I say—officer!''

Don's revolver was in his hand; people were pressing around us, but when

they saw the revolver they began scattering. The giant made a lunge and broke away from us, heedless that Don might have shot him.

"What's all this? I say, you three, what are you up to?"

The policeman came on a run. A group of soldiers passing on bicycles, flung the machines aside and came dashing at us. The giant stood suddenly docile.

"Officer, these young men attacked me."

"He's a liar!" Don shouted. "Watch him! He might be armed—don't let him get away from you!"

The law surrounded us. "Here's my weapon," said Don. "Bob, give up your revolver."

In the turmoil Don plucked the policeman aside.

"I'm nephew of the Honorable Arthur Dorrance. Take us to your chief. I made that uproar to catch that big fellow."

The name of the Honorable Arthur Dorrance was magic. The policeman stared at our giant captive who now was surrounded by the soldiers.

"But I say—"

"Take us all in and send for Mr. Dorrance. He's at the Government House."

"But I say—That big blighter—"

"We think he's one of the ghosts!" Don whispered.

"Oh, my Gawd!"

With the crowd following us we were hurried away to the police station nearby.

* * * * *

The sergeant said, "The Chief will be here in a few minutes. And we've sent for Mr. Dorrance."

"Good enough, Brown." It chanced that Don knew this sergeant very well. "Did you search the fellow?"

"Yes. No weapon in his clothes."

I whispered, "I saw a wire under his collar."

"Sh! No use telling that now, Bob."

I realized it. These policemen were frightened enough at our captive. Don added, "Before my uncle and the Chief arrive, let me have a talk with that fellow, will you?"

They had locked him up; and in the excitement of our arrival at the station both Don and I had completely forgotten the wire we had seen at his collar. But we remembered it now, and the same thought occurred to both of us. We had locked up this mysterious enemy, but would the prison bars hold him?

"Good Lord!" Don exclaimed. "Bob, those wires—Sergeant, we shouldn't have left that fellow alone! Is he alone! Come on!"

With the frightened mystified sergeant leading us we dashed along the little white corridor to the windowless cell in which the giant was confined. At the cell-door a group of soldiers lounged in the corridor.

"Smooth talker, that fellow."

"Gor blime me, who is he?"

We arrived with a rush. "Is he in there?" Don shouted. "Open the door, you fellows! See here, you watch him—we've got to get his clothes off. He's got some mechanism—wires and things underneath his clothes!"

"Get out of the way!" ordered the sergeant. "I'll open it!"

There was silence from behind the door. The prisoner had been in the cell no more than a minute or two.

* * * * *

We burst open the door. The cell was dimly illumined. The figure of the giant stood backed in its further corner. But at the sight of him we all stood transfixed with horror. His shoes, trousers, shirt, jacket and cap lay in a little pile at his feet. He stood revealed in the short tight-fitting silvery garments. The wires were looped about his arms and legs and he had pulled a mesh of them over his head in lieu of a helmet.

He stood regarding us sardonically. And in that instant while we were stricken with the shock of it, I saw that the figure was fading. It was a solid human form no longer! A silvery cast had come upon it. Another second passed; it was visibly growing tenuous, wraithlike! It was melting while we stared at it, until in that breathless instant I realized that the wall behind it was showing through.

A wraith! An apparition! The vision of a ghost standing there, leering at us!

The soldiers had retreated back into the corridor behind us. The sergeant gripped me, and his other hand, wavering with fright, clutched a revolver.

"But it's—it's going!"

Don gasped, "Too late! Sergeant, give me that gun!"

"Wait!" I shouted. "Don't shoot at it!"

The shimmering glowing white figure was slowly moving downward as though floating through the cell-floor. Its own invisible surface was evidently not here but lower down, and it was beginning to drop. I don't know what frenzied courage—if courage it could be called—was inspiring me. I was wholly confused, but nevertheless I struck Don and the sergeant aside and rushed at the thing.

* * * * *

It was a sensation most horrible. From the waist up it was still above the floor of the cell. My wildly flailing arms went through the chest! But I felt nothing. It was not even like waving aside a mist. There was nothing. I saw my solid fist plunge through the leering ghostly face. I fought wildly, with a panic upon me, against the

glowing phosphorescent nothingness of the apparition. My feet were stamping on its chest and shoulders. Then, as it sank lower, only the grinning face was down there.

Panting, and with the cold sweat of horror upon me, I felt Don shoving me aside.

"Too late!"

And then the sergeant's shot rang out. The bullet clattered against the solid stone floor of the cell. The acrid smoke of the powder rolled over us; and cleared in a moment to show us the apparition several feet below the floor level. It seemed to strike its solidity of ground. I saw it fall the last little distance with a rush; land, and pick itself up. And with a last sardonic grin upward at us, the dim white figure ran. Dwindling smaller, dimmer, until in a moment it was gone into the Unknown.

As though a light had struck upon me came the realization.

"Don, this is rational, this thing! Some strange science!"

All day we had been vaguely realizing it. Intangible, but rational enemies were stealing white girls of Bermuda. Invaders from another planet? We had thought it might be that. Certainly it was nothing supernatural. These was not ghosts.

But now came a new realization. "Don! That's another world down there! Another realm! The fourth dimension—that's what it is! These things everybody's calling ghosts—it's the fourth dimension, Don! People of the fourth dimension coming out to attack us!"

And already the real menace had come! At that moment, half a mile away across the harbor on the slope of the little hill in Paget, an army of the White Invaders suddenly materialized, with dull, phosphorescent-green light-beams flashing around the countryside, melting trees and vegetation and people into nothingness!

The attack upon Bermuda had begun!

CHAPTER IV

Ambushed!

The events which I have now to describe are world history, and have been written in many forms and by many observers. I must, however, sketch them in broadest outline for the continuity of this personal narrative of the parts played by my friends and myself in the dire and astounding affair which was soon to bring chaos, not only to little Bermuda but to the great United States as well, and a near panic everywhere in the world.

On this evening of May 15th, 1938, the White Invaders showed themselves for the first time as rational human enemies. The residential suburb of Paget lies across the little harbor from the city of Hamilton. It is a mile or so by road around the bay,

and a few minutes across the water by ferry. The island in the Paget section is a mere strip of land less than half a mile wide in most places, with the sheltered waters of the harbor on one side, and the open Atlantic with a magnificent pink-white beach on the other. The two are divided by a razor-back ridge—a line of little hills a hundred feet or so high, with narrow white roads and white stone residences set on the hill-slopes amid spacious lawns and tropical gardens; and with several lavish hotels on the bay shore, and others over the ridge, fronting the beach.

The invaders landed on the top of the ridge. It seemed that, without warning, a group of white-clad men were in a cedar grove up there. They spread out, running along the roads. They seemed carrying small hand-weapons from which phosphorescent-green light-beams flashed into the night.

The first reports were chaotic. A few survivors appeared in Hamilton who claimed to have been very close to the enemy. But for the most part the descriptions came from those who had fled when still a mile or more away. The news spread as though upon the wings of a gale. Within an hour the hotels were emptied; the houses all along the shore and the bayside hill-slope were deserted by their occupants. Boats over there brought the excited people into Hamilton until no more boats were available. Others came madly driving around the harbor road, on bicycles, and on foot—and still others escaped toward distant Somerset.

* * * * *

A thousand people or more came in within that hour. But there were others who did not come—those who were living in the score or two of houses up on the ridge in the immediate neighborhood of where the invaders appeared....

Don and I met Mr. Dorrance at the police station within a few minutes after the news of the Paget attack reached us. We hurried back to the restaurant and found Jane still there with the Blakinsons. Ten minutes later we were all in the Government House, receiving the most authentic reports available.

From the windows of the second floor room where Mr. Dorrance sat with a number of the officials, Don, Jane, and I could see across the harbor and to the ridge where the enemy was operating. It was not much over two miles from us. The huge, slightly flattened moon had risen. The bay and the distant little hills were flooded with its light. We could see, off on the ridge-top, the tiny flashing green beams. But there was no sound save the turmoil of the excited little city around us.

"They don't seem to be moving," Don murmured. "They're right where they were first reported."

It seemed as though the small group of light-beams, darting back and forth, nevertheless originated from one unshifting place. The beams, we realized, must be extremely intense to be visible even these two miles or so, for we could see

that they were very small and of very short range—more like a hand-flashlight than anything else. How many of the enemy were there? They were men, we understood: solid, human men garbed in the fashion of the apparitions which had been so widely seen.

The patrolling airplane, connected with us here by wireless telephone, gave us further details. There seemed to be some fifty of the invaders. They stood in a group in what had been a small cedar grove. It was a barren field now; the trees had melted and vanished before the silent blasts of the green light-beams. They had, these beams, seemingly a range of under a hundred feet. The invaders had, at first, run with them along the nearby roads and attacked the nearest houses. Part of those houses were still standing, save for the wooden portion of them which had vanished into nothingness as the green light touched it. The people, too, were annihilated. The airplane pilot had seen a man running near the field trying to escape. The light touched him, clung to him for a moment. There was an instant as he fell that he seemed melting into a ghostly figure; and then he was gone.

* * * * *

Fifty invaders. But they were human; they could be attacked. When they first appeared, the nature of them still unrealized, a physician's automobile, manned by three soldiers, had been coming along the bay road at the foot of the ridge. The soldiers turned it into a cross road and mounted the hill. Two of them left it, scouting to see what was happening; the other stayed in the car. One of the enemy suddenly appeared. His ray struck the car. Its tires, its woodwork, and fabric and cushions melted and vanished, and the man within it likewise disappeared. Everything organic vanished under the assailing green beam. The other two soldiers fired at the attacker. He was human. He fell as their bullets struck him. Then others of his fellows came running. The two soldiers were driven away, but they escaped to tell of the encounter.

The airplane pilot, half an hour later, flew low and fired down into the group of enemy figures. He thought that one of them fell. He also thought he was out of range of their beams. But a pencil-point of the green light thinned and lengthened out. It darted up to his hundred-and-fifty-foot altitude and caught one of his wings. The plane fell disabled into the bay near the city docks, but the pilot swam safely ashore.

I need not detail the confusion and panic of the government officials who were gathered here in the room where Don, Jane and I stood watching and listening to the excitement of the incoming reports. For quiet little Bermuda the unprecedented situation was doubly frightening. An attack would have to be made upon the invaders. There were only fifty of the enemy; the soldiers and the police could in a few hours be mobilized to rush them and kill them all.

But could that be done? The thing had so many weird aspects, the invaders

still seemed so much in the nature of the supernatural, that Mr. Dorrance advised caution. The enemy was now—this was about ten o'clock in the evening—quietly gathered in the little field on the ridge-top. They seemed, with their first attack over, no longer offensive. But, if assailed, who could say what they would do?

* * * * *

And a thousand unprecedented things to do were pressing upon the harassed officials. Panic-stricken crowds now surged out of all control in the Hamilton streets. Refugees were coming in, homeless, needing care. The soldiers and the police were scattered throughout the islands, without orders of what to do to meet these new conditions.

And new, ever more frightening reports poured in. The telephone service, which links as a local call nearly every house throughout the islands, was flooded with frantic activity. From nearly every parish came reports of half-materialized ghosts. Fifty invaders? There were that many gathered on the Paget hill, but it seemed that there must be a thousand watching apparitions scattered throughout the islands. Harmless, merely frightening, wraiths. But if that little group in Paget were assailed, this other thousand might in a moment cease to be harmless "ghosts."

The astounded Bermuda officials were forced now to accept the realization that this was solid science. Incredible, fantastic, unbelievable—yet here it was upon us. Some unknown, invisible realm co-existed here in this same space. Its inhabitants had found a way to come out.

The government wireless, and the Canadian cables, could no longer withhold such news as this. Bermuda appealed now to Washington and to London for help. Warships would be coming shortly. Passenger liners on the high seas bringing holiday visitors, were turned aside. The ships in the port of New York would not sail for Bermuda tomorrow.

I think that the outside world would have had jeering publics amused at little Bermuda hysterical over a fancied attack from the fabled fourth dimension. But by midnight this night, the United States at least was in no mood for jeering. A message came—reaching us soon after eleven o'clock, Bermuda time—by cable, through Halifax from Washington. The thing already had passed beyond the scope of the Bermudas. White apparitions were seen on the Atlantic seaboard near Savannah. And then at Charleston; and throughout the night at several other points farther north. None materialized into solidity. But the "ghosts" were seen, appearing, vanishing, and reappearing always farther north.

It was a world menace!

* * * * *

At about midnight Mr. Dorrance joined Jane, Don and me where we stood by the Government House windows watching the distant motionless group of enemy

lights. He was pale and harassed.

"No use for you to stay here," he told us. "Don, you and Bob take Jane home. It's the safest place now."

The reports seemed to indicate that of all the parishes, St. Georges was now most free of the apparitions.

"Go home," he insisted. "You and Bob stay with Jane. Take care of her, lads." He smiled grimly. "We—all the government—may be moving to St. Georges by morning."

"But, father," Jane protested, "what will you do? Stay here?"

"For a while. I'll drive over by daybreak. I'll keep the Victoria. You have your cycles; you three ride over. Be careful, lads. You have your revolvers?"

"Yes," said Don.

We had no time for leave-taking. He was at once called away from us.

We left the Government House shortly after that, got our bicycles and started for the north shore road. Government Hill, where the road climbed through a deep cut in the solid rock, was thronged with carriages, and with cyclists walking up the hill. Most of the traffic was going in one direction—refugees leaving this proximity to the enemy.

We reached the top of the hill, mounted and began the long coast down. In an hour and a half or less we would be home.... Ah, if one could only lift the veil which hides even the immediate future, upon the brink of which we must always stand unseeing!

The north-shore road had the rocky seacoast upon our left—calm moonlit ocean across which in this direction lay the Carolinas some seven hundred miles away. We had gone, perhaps three miles from Hamilton. The road was less crowded here. A group of apparitions had been seen in the neighborhood of the Aquarium, which was ahead of us, and most of the refugees were taking the middle road along Harrington Sound in the center of the island.

But we decided to continue straight on. It was shorter.

"And there will be more police along here," Don reasoned.

Heaven knows we did not feel in immediate danger. Cycling soldiers passed us at frequent intervals, giving us the news of what lay ahead. And we both had revolvers.

* * * * *

We came presently to the bottom of one of the many steep little hills up which it is difficult to ride. We were walking up the grade, pushing our machines with Jane between us. A group of soldiers came coasting down the hill, but when we were half-way up they had passed out of sight. It chanced at the moment that we were alone on the road. No house was near us. The ocean to our left lay at the

bottom of a fifty-foot rocky cliff; to the right was a thick line of oleander trees, heavy with bloom.

Ahead of us, to the right within the line of oleanders, the glowing white figure of an apparition was visible. We stopped, out of breath from the climb, and stood by the roadside.

"See it there?" Don murmured. "Let's wait and watch it a moment."

One may get used to anything. We were not frightened. The figure, no more than twenty feet ahead of us, stood partly within a tree-trunk. It could not materialize there. It was the figure of a man, with helmet and looped wires.

"Not that fellow who called himself Tako," I whispered.

This one was smaller, no larger than Jane, perhaps. He raised his arms as though warning us to stop. We stood gazing at him, undecided whether to retreat or advance. An omnibus carriage coming from St. Georges stopped at the brow of the hill. Its occupants climbed out and began shouting at the apparition, at the same time flinging stones, one of which came bounding past us.

"Hi!" I called. "Stop that! No sense to that!"

* * * * *

Suddenly I heard a rustling of the oleanders at my side. We had no warning; our attention was wholly upon the apparition and the men by the carriage on the brow of the hill flinging stones. There was a rustling; the shadowed oleanders parted and figures leaped upon us!

I recall hearing Don shout, and Jane cry out. Our cycles clattered to the road. I fired at an oncoming white figure, but missed. The solid form of a man struck me and I went down, tangled in my wheel. There was an instant when I was conscious of fighting madly with a human antagonist. I was conscious of Don fighting, too. Jane stood, gripped by a man. Four or five of them had leaped upon us.

I had many instant impressions; then as I fought something struck my head and I faded into insensibility. I must have recovered within a moment. I was lying on the ground, partly upon a bicycle.

Don was lying near me. White figures of men with Jane in their midst were standing off the road, partly behind the bushes. They were holding her, and one of them was swiftly adjusting a network of wires upon her. Then, as I revived further, I heard shouts; people were arriving from down the hill. I tried to struggle to my feet, but fell back.

In the bushes the figures—and the figure of Jane—were turning silvery; fading into wraiths. They drifted down into the ground. They were gone.

CHAPTER V

Into the Enemy Camp

"But Bob, I won't go back to Government House," Don whispered. "Lord, we can't do that—get in for theories and questions and plans to gather a police squad. Every minute counts."

"What can we do?"

"Break away from these fellows—send Uncle Arthur a message—anything at all; and say we'll be back in half an hour. I tell you, Jane is gone—they've got her. You saw them take her. By now probably, they've got her off there in Paget among them. We've got to do something drastic, and do it now. If the police attacked—suppose Jane is in that Paget group—the first thing they'd do when the police came at them would be to kill her. We can't go at it that way, I tell you."

We were trudging back up Government Hill with a group of soldiers around us. I had revived to find myself not seriously injured; a lump was on my head and a scalp wound where something had struck me. Don had regained consciousness a moment later and was wholly unharmed. His experience had been different from mine. Two men had seized him. He was aware of a sudden puff of an acrid gas in his face, and his senses had faded. But when they returned he had his full strength almost at once.

We realized what had happened. Half a dozen of the enemy were lying in ambush there on the roadside. It was young white girls they were after, and when we appeared with Jane, one of the invaders showed himself as an apparition to stop us, and then the others, fully materialized and hiding in the oleanders, had leaped upon us. They had had only time to escape with Jane, ignoring Don and me where we had fallen. They seemed also not aware of the nature of our weapons for they had not taken our revolvers.

* * * * *

Had they gone now with Jane into the other realm of the Unknown? Or was she with them, over in Paget now in the little enemy camp there which was defying Bermuda? We thought very possibly it was the latter. The giant who had called himself Tako, who had escaped us in the Police Station, had been driven from our minds by all the excitement which followed. Was that Tako the leader of these invaders? Had he, for some time perhaps, been living as he said in the Hamiltonia Hotel? Scouting around Bermuda, selecting the young girls whom his cohorts were to abduct?

The thoughts made us shudder. He had noticed Jane. He it was, doubtless, who as an apparition had prowled outside Jane's room the night before last. And last night he had followed us to the Fort Beach. And again to-night in the restaurant he had been watching Jane. These men who had captured Jane now might

very well carry her to Paget and hand her over to their leader, this giant Tako.

A frenzy of desperation was upon Don and me at the thought.

"But what shall we do?" I whispered.

"Get away from these soldiers, Bob. We've got our revolvers. We'll ride over there to Paget—just the two of us. It's our best chance that way. Creep up and see what's over there. And if Jane is there, we've got to get her, Bob—get her some way, somehow."

We could plan no further than that. But to return to Government House, to face Jane's father with the tale of what had happened, and then become involved in an official attempt to attack with open hostilities the enemy in Paget—that was unthinkable.

* * * * *

At the foot of Government Hill, with a trumped-up excuse, Don got us away from our escort. The night was far darker now; a gray-white mass of clouds had come up to obscure the moon. We cycled through the outskirts of Hamilton to the harbor road and followed it around the marshy end of the bay and into Paget. There had been at first many vehicles coming in from the beach, but when we passed the intersection and nothing lay ahead of us but the Paget ridge we found the road deserted.

We had had our handle-bar flash-lights turned on, but now we shut them off, riding slowly into the darkness. Don presently dismounted.

"Better leave our wheels here."

"Yes."

We laid them on the ground in a little roadside banana patch. We were no more than a quarter of a mile from the enemy now; the glow of their green beams standing up into the air showed on the ridge-top ahead of us.

"We'll take the uproad," Don whispered. "Shall we? And when we get to the top, follow some path, instead of a road."

"All right," I agreed.

We started on foot up the steep side road which led from the bay shore to the summit of the ridge. The houses here were all dark and deserted, their occupants long since having fled to Hamilton. It was enemy country here now.

We reached the summit and plunged into a cedar grove which had a footpath through it. The green light-beams seemed very close; we could see them in a little group standing motionless up into the darkness of the sky.

"Can't plan," Don whispered. "But we must keep together. Get up as close as we can and see what conditions are."

And see if Jane were here.... It echoed through my head, and I knew it was also Don's guiding thought.

* * * * *

Another ten minutes. We were advancing with the utmost caution. The cedar grove was almost black. Then we came to the end of it. There was a winding road and two white houses a hundred feet or so apart. And beyond the houses was a stretch of open field, strangely denuded of vegetation.

"There they are, Bob!" Don sank to the ground with me beside him. We crouched, revolvers in hand, gazing at the strange scene. The field had been a cedar grove, but all the vegetation now was gone, leaving only the thin layer of soil and the outcropping patches of Bermuda's famous blue-gray rock. The houses, too, had been blasted. One was on this side of the field, quite near us. Its walls and roof had partially fallen; its windows and door rectangles yawned black and empty, with the hurricane shutters and the wooden window casements gone and the panes shattered into a litter of broken glass.

But the house held our attention only a moment. Across the two-hundred-foot field we could plainly see the invaders—forty or fifty men's figures dispersed in a little group. It seemed a sort of encampment. The green light beams seemed emanating from small hand projectors resting now on the ground. The sheen from them gave a dull lurid-green cast to the scene. The men were sitting about in small groups. And some were moving around, seemingly assembling larger apparatus. We saw a projector, a cylindrical affair, which half a dozen of them were dragging.

"Bob! Can you make out—back by the banana grove—captives? Look!"

* * * * *

The encampment was at the further corner of the naked field. A little banana grove joined it. We could see where the enemy light had struck, partially melting off some of the trees so that now they stood leprous. In the grove were other figures of men, and it seemed that among them were some girls. Was Jane there among those captives?

"We've got to get closer," I whispered. "Don, that second house—if we could circle around and get there. From the corner of it, we'd be hidden."

"We'll try it."

The farther house was also in ruins. It stood near the back edge of the naked field and was within fifty feet of the banana grove. We circled back, and within ten minutes more were up against the broken front veranda of the house.

"No one here," Don whispered.

"No, evidently not."

"Let's try getting around the back and see them from the back corner."

We were close enough now to hear the voices in the banana grove. The half-wrecked house against which we crouched was a litter of stones and broken glass.

It was black and silent inside.

"Don, look!"

Sidewise across the broken veranda the group of figures in the field were partly visible. We saw ghostly wraiths now among them—apparitions three or four feet above the ground. They solidified and dropped to earth, with their comrades gathering over them. The babble of voices in a strange tongue reached us. New arrivals materializing!

But was Jane here? And Tako, the giant? We had seen nothing of either of them. These men seemed all undersized rather than gigantic. We were about to start around the corner of the veranda for a closer view of the figures in the grove, when a sound near at hand froze us. A murmur of voices! Men within the house!

* * * * *

I pulled Don flat to the ground against the stone steps of the porch. We heard voices; then footsteps. A little green glow of light appeared. We could see over the porch floor into the black yawning door rectangle. Two men were moving around in the lower front room, and the radiation from their green lights showed them plainly. They were small fellows in white, tight-fitting garments, with the black helmet and the looped wires.

"Don, when they come out—" I murmured it against his ear. "If we could strike them down without raising an alarm, and get those suits—"

"Quiet! They're coming!"

They extinguished their light. They came down the front steps, and as they reached the ground and turned aside Don and I rose up in the shadows and struck at them desperately with the handles of our revolvers. Don's man fell silently. Mine was able to ward off the blow; he whirled and flashed on his little light. But the beam missed me as I bent under it and seized him around the middle, reaching up with a hand for his mouth. Then Don came at us, and under his silent blow my antagonist wilted.

We had made only a slight noise; there seemed no alarm.

"Get them into the house," Don murmured. "Inside; someone may come any minute."

We dragged them into the dark and littered lower room. We still had our revolvers, and now I had the small hand-projector of the green light-beam. It was a strangely weightless little cylinder, with a firing mechanism which I had no idea how to operate.

In a moment we had stripped our unconscious captives of their white woven garments. In the darkness we were hopelessly ruining the mechanism of wires and dials. But we did not know how to operate the mechanism in any event; and our plan was only to garb ourselves like the enemy. Thus disguised, with the hel-

mets on our heads, we could get closer, creep among them and perhaps find Jane....

The woven garments which I had thought metal, stretched like rubber and were curiously light in weight. I got the impression now that the garments, these wires and disks, the helmet and the belt with its dial-face—all this strange mechanism and even the green-ray projector weapon—all of it was organic substance. And this afterward proved to be the fact.[1]

[1] As we later learned, the scientific mechanism by which the transition was made from the realm of the fourth dimension to our own earthly world and back again, was only effective to transport organic substances. The green light-beam was of similar limitation. An organic substance of our world upon which it struck was changed in vibration rate and space-time co-ordinates to coincide with the characteristics with which the light-current was endowed. Thus the invaders used their beams as a weapon. The light flung whatever it touched of organic material with horrible speed of transition away into the Unknown—to the fourth, fifth, or perhaps still other realms. In effect—annihilation.

The mechanism of wires and dials (and small disks which were storage batteries of the strange current) was of slower, more controllable operation. Thus it could be used for transportation—for space-time traveling, as Earth scientists later came to call it. The invaders, wearing this mechanism, materialized at will into the state of matter existing in our world—and by a reversal of the co-ordinates of the current, dematerialized into the more tenuous state of their own realm.

We were soon disrobed and garbed in the white suits of our enemies. The jacket and trunks stretched like rubber to fit us.

"Can't hope to get the wires right," Don whispered. "Got your helmet?"

"Yes. The belt fastens behind, Don."

"I know. These accursed little disks, what are they?"

We did not know them for storage batteries as yet. They were thin flat circles of flexible material with a cut in them so that we could spring the edges apart and clasp them like bracelets at intervals on our arms and legs. The wires connected them, looped up to the helmet, and down to the broad belt where there was an indicator-dial in the middle of the front.[2]

[2] We were soon to learn also that they were bringing into our world weapons, food, clothing and a variety of equipment by encasing the articles in containers operated by these same mechanisms of wires carrying the transition current. The transportation was possible because all the articles they brought with them were of organic substance.

* * * * *

We worked swiftly and got the apparatus on somehow. The wires, broken and awry, would not be noticed in the darkness.

"Ready, Don?"

"Yes. I—I guess so."

"I've got this light cylinder, but we don't know how to work it."

"Carry it openly in your hand. It adds to the disguise." There was a note of triumph in Don's voice. "It's dark out there—only the green glow. We'll pass for them, Bob, at a little distance anyway. Come on."

We started out of the room. "You can hide your revolver in the belt—there seems to be a pouch."

"Yes."

We passed noiselessly to the veranda. Over our bare feet we were wearing a sort of woven buskin which fastened with wires to the ankle disks.

"Keep together," Don whispered. "Take it slowly, but walk openly—no hesitation."

My heart was pounding, seemingly in my throat, half-smothering me. "Around the back corner of the house," I whispered. "Then into the banana grove. Straighten."

"Yes. But not right among them. A little off to one side, passing by as though we were on some errand."

"If they spot us?"

"Open fire. Cut and run for it. All we can do, Bob."

Side by side we walked slowly along the edge of the house. At the back corner, the small banana grove opened before us. Twenty feet away, under the spreading green leaves of the trees a dozen or so men were working over apparatus. And in their center a group of captive girls sat huddled on the ground. Men were passing back and forth. At the edge of the trees, by the naked field, men seemed preparing to serve a meal. There was a bustle of activity everywhere; a babble of strange, subdued voices.

* * * * *

We were well under the trees now. Don, choosing our route, was leading us to pass within ten or fifteen feet of where the girls were sitting. It was dark here in the grove; the litter of rotted leaves on the soft ground scrunched and swished under our tread.

There was light over by the girls. I stared at their huddled forms; their white, terrified faces. Girls of Bermuda, all of them young, all exceptionally pretty. I thought I recognized Eunice Arton. But still it seemed that Jane was not here.... And I saw men seated watchfully near them—men with cylinder weapons in their hands.

Don occasionally would stoop, poking at the ground as though looking for something. He was heading us in a wide curve through the grove so that we were

skirting the seated figures. We had already been seen, of course, but as yet no one heeded us. But every moment we expected the alarm to come. My revolver was in the pouch of my belt where I could quickly jerk it out. I brandished the useless light cylinder ostentatiously.

"Don!" I gripped him. We stopped under a banana tree, half hidden in its drooping leaves. "Don—more of them coming!"

Out in the empty field, apparitions of men were materializing. Then we heard a tread near us, and stiffened. I thought that we were discovered. A man passed close to us, heading in toward the girls. He saw us; he raised a hand palm outward with a gesture of greeting and we answered it.

* * * * *

For another two or three minutes we stood there, peering, searching for some sign of Jane.... Men were distributing food to the girls now.

And then we saw Jane! She was seated alone with her back against a banana tree, a little apart from the others. And near her was a seated man's figure, guarding her.

"Don! There she is! We can get near her! Keep on the way we were going. We must go in a wide curve to come up behind her."

We started forward again. We were both wildly excited; Jane was at the edge of the lighted area. We could come up behind her; shoot her guard; seize her and dash off.... I saw that the mesh of wires, disks and a helmet were on Jane....

Don suddenly stumbled over something on the ground. A man who had been lying there, asleep perhaps, rose up. We went sidewise, and passed him.

But his voice followed us. Unintelligible, angry words.

"Keep on!" I murmured. "Don't turn!"

It was a tense moment. The loud words brought attention to us. Then there came what seemed a question from someone over by the girls. We could not answer it. Then two or three other men shouted at us.

Don stopped, undecided.

"No!" I whispered. "Go ahead! Faster Don! It's darker ahead."

We started again. It seemed that all the camp was looking our way. Voices were shouting. Someone called a jibe and there was a burst of laughter. And from behind us came a man's voice, vaguely familiar, with a sharp imperative command.

Should we run? Could we escape now, or would a darting green beam strike us? And we were losing our chance for Jane.

Desperation was on me. "Faster, Don!"

The voice behind us grew more imperative. Then from nearby, two men came running at us. An uproar was beginning. We were discovered!

* * * * *

Don's revolver was out. It seemed suddenly that men were all around us. From behind a tree-trunk squarely ahead a figure appeared with leveled cylinder. The ground leaves were swishing behind us with swiftly advancing footsteps.

"Easy, Bob!"

Don found his wits. If he had not at that moment we would doubtless have been annihilated in another few seconds. "Bob, we're caught—don't shoot!"

I had flung away the cylinder and drawn my revolver; but Don shoved down my extended hand and held up his own hand.

"We're caught!" He shouted aloud. "Don't kill us! Don't kill us!"

It seemed that everywhere we looked was a leveled cylinder. I half turned at the running footsteps behind us. A man's voice called in English.

"Throw down your weapons! Down!"

Don cast his revolver away, and mine followed. I was aware that Jane had recognized Don's voice, and that she was on her feet staring in our direction with horrified eyes.

The man from behind pounced upon us. It was the giant, Tako.

"Well, my friends of the restaurant! The American who knows New York City so well! And the Bermudian! This is very much to my liking. You thought your jail would imprison me, did you not?"

He stood regarding us with his sardonic smile, while our captors surrounded us, searching our belts for other weapons. And he added, "I was garbed like you when we last met. Now you are garbed like me. How is that?"

* * * * *

They led us into the lighted area of the grove. "The American who knows New York City so well," Tako added. "And the Bermudian says he knows it also. It is what you would call an affair of luck, having you here."

He seemed highly pleased. He gazed at us smilingly. We stood silent while the men roughly stripped the broken wires and disks from us. They recognized the equipment. There was a jargon of argument in their strange guttural language. Then at Tako's command three of them started for the house.

Jane had cried out at sight of us. Her captor had ordered her back to her seat by the tree.

"So?" Tako commented. "You think silence is best? You are wise. I am glad you did not make us kill you just now. I am going to New York and you shall go with me; what you know of the city may be of help. We are through with Bermuda. There are not many girls here. But in the great United States I understand there are very many. You shall help us capture them."

Don began, "The girl over there——"

"Your sister? Your wife? Perhaps she knows something of New York and its girls also. We will keep her close with us. If you three choose to help me, you need have no fear of harm." He waved aside the men with imperious commands. "Come, we will join this girl of yours. She is very pretty, is she not? And like you—not cowardly. I have not been able to make her talk at all."

The dawn of this momentous night was at hand when, with the networks of wires and disks properly adjusted upon us, Tako took Jane, Don and me with him into the Fourth Dimension.

Strange transition! Strange and diabolical plot which now was unfolded to us! Strangely fantastic, weird journey from this Bermuda hilltop through the Unknown to the city of New York!

CHAPTER VI

The Attack upon New York

I must sketch now the main events following this night of May 15th and 16th as the outside world saw them. The frantic reports from Bermuda were forced into credibility by the appearance of apparitions at many points along the Atlantic seaboard of the southern States. They were sporadic appearances that night. No attacks were reported. But in all, at least a thousand wraithlike figures of men must have been seen. The visitations began at midnight and ended with dawn. To anyone, reading in the morning papers or hearing from the newscasters that "ghosts" were seen at Savannah, the thing had no significance. But in Washington, where officials took a summary of all the reports and attempted an analysis of them, one fact seemed clear. The wraiths were traveling northward. It could almost be fancied that this was an army, traveling in the borderland of the Unknown. Appearing momentarily as though coming out to scout around and see the contour and the characteristics of our realm; disappearing again into invisibility, to show themselves in an hour or so many miles farther north.

The reports indicated also that it was not one group of the enemy, but several—and all of them traveling northward. The most northerly group of them by dawn showed itself up near Cape Hatteras.

The news, when it was fully disseminated that next day, brought a mingling of derision and terror from the public. The world rang with the affair. Remote nations, feeling safe since nothing of the kind seemed menacing them, were amused that distant America, supposedly so scientifically modern, should be yielding to superstition worthy only of the Middle Ages. The accounts from Bermuda were more difficult to explain. And England, with Bermuda involved, was not skeptical; as a matter of fact, the British authorities were astonished. Warships were starting for Bermuda; and that morning of May 16th, with the passenger lines in New York not sailing for Bermuda, American warships were ordered to Hamilton. The men-

ace, whatever it was, would soon be ended.

* * * * *

That was May 16th. Another night passed, and on May 17th the world rang with startled horror and a growing terror. Panics were beginning in all the towns and cities of the American seaboard north of Cape Hatteras. It was no longer a matter of merely seeing "ghosts." There had been real attacks the previous night.

There had been a variety of incidents, extraordinarily horrifying—so diverse, so unexpected that they could not have been guarded against. It was a dark night, an area of low pressure with leaden storm-clouds over all the Atlantic coastal region, from Charleston north to the Virginia Capes. A coastal passenger ship off Hatteras sent out a frantic radio distress call. The apparitions of men had suddenly been seen in mid-air directly in the ship's course. The message was incoherent; the vessel's wireless operator was locked in his room at the transmitter, wildly describing an attack upon the ships.

The white apparitions—a group of twenty or thirty men—had been marching in mid-air when the ship sighted them directly over its bow. In the darkness of the night they were only a hundred feet ahead when the lookout saw them. In a moment the vessel was under them, and they began materializing.... The account grew increasingly incoherent. The figures materialized and fell to the deck, picked themselves up and began running about the ship, attacking with little green light-beams. The ship's passengers and crew vanished, obliterated; annihilated. It seemed that young women among the passengers were being spared. The ship was melting—the wooden decks, all the wooden super-structure melting.... A few moments of fantastic horror, then the distress call died into silence as doubtless the green light-beams struck the operator's little cabin.

* * * * *

That vessel was found the next day, grounded on the shoals off Hatteras. The sea was oily and calm. It lay like a gruesome shell, as though some fire had swept all its interior. Yet not fire either, for there were no embers, no ashes. Diseased, leprous, gruesomely weird with parts of its interior intact and other parts obliterated. And no living soul was upon it save one steward crouching in a lower cabin laughing with madness which the shock of what he had seen brought upon him.

On land, a railroad train in Virginia had been wrecked, struck apparently by a greenish ray. And also in Virginia, during the early evening in a village, an outdoor festival at which there were many young girls was attacked by apparitions suddenly coming into solidity. The report said that thirty or more young girls were missing. The little town was in chaos.

And the chaos, that next day, spread everywhere. It was obvious now that the enemy was advancing northward. In Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, panics were beginning. New York City was seething with excitement. People were leav-

ing all the towns and cities of the area. An exodus north and westward. In New York, every steamship, airplane and railroad train was crowded with departing people. The roads to Canada and to the west were thronged with outgoing automobiles.

But it was only a small part of the millions who remained. And the transportation systems were at once thrown into turmoil, with the sudden frantic demands threatening to break them down. And then a new menace came to New York. Incoming food supplies for its millions crowded into that teeming area around Manhattan, were jeopardized. The army of men engaged in all the myriad activities by which the great city sustained itself were as terrified as anyone else. They began deserting their posts. And local communication systems went awry. The telephones, the lights, local transportation—all of them began limping, threatening to break.

* * * * *

Tremendous, intricate human machine by whose constant activity so many millions are enabled to live so close together! No one could realize how vastly interwoven are a million activities which make life in a great city comfortable and safe until something goes wrong! And one wrong thing so swiftly affects another! As though in a vastly intricate mechanism little cogs were breaking, and the breaks spreading until presently the giant fly-wheels could no longer turn.

If the startled Federal and State officials could have foreseen even the events of the next forty-eight hours they would have wanted New York City deserted of the population. But that was impossible. Even if everyone could have been frightened into leaving, the chaos of itself would have brought death to untold thousands.

As it was, May 17th and 18th showed New York in a growing chaos. Officials now were wildly trying to stem the panics, trying to keep organized the great machines of city life.

It is no part of my plan for this narrative to try and detail the events in New York City as the apparitions advanced upon it. The crowded bridges and tunnels; the traffic and transportation accidents; the failure of the lights and telephones and broadcasting systems; the impending food shortage; the breaking out of disease from a score of causes; the crushed bodies lying in the streets where frantic mobs had trampled them and no one was available to take them away. The scenes beggar description.

* * * * *

And in all this the enemy had played no part save that of causing terror. Warships gathered in New York harbor were impotent. State troops massed in New Jersey, across the Hudson from New York, and in Putnam and Westchester Counties, were powerless to do more than try and help the escaping people since there

was no enemy of tangible substance to attack. Patrolling airplanes, armed with bombs, were helpless. The white apparitions were gathering everywhere in the neighborhood of New York City. But they remained only apparitions, imponderable wraiths, non-existent save that they could be dimly seen. And even had they materialized, no warships could shell the city, for millions of desperate people were still within it trying to get away.

The news from little Bermuda was submerged, unheeded, in this greater catastrophe. But on the night of May 17th when the American warships arrived off Hamilton, the Paget invaders were gone.

The menace in Bermuda was over; it was the great New York City which was menaced now. The apparitions which had advanced from the south were suddenly joined by a much more numerous army. On the night of May 19th it had reached New York. Two or three thousand glowing white shapes were apparent, with yet other thousands perhaps hovering just beyond visibility. They made no attack. They stood encamped on the borderland of the Unknown realm to which they belonged. Busy with their preparations for battle and watching the stricken city to which already mere terror had brought the horror of disease and death.

It seemed now that this Fourth Dimension terrain co-existing within in the space of New York City, must be a tumbled, mountainous region of crags and spires, and yawning pits, ravines and valley depths. Jagged and precipitous indeed, for there were apparitions encamped in the air above Manhattan and harbor—higher in altitude than the Chrysler or the Empire State towers. Other wraiths showed in a dozen places lower down—some within the city buildings themselves. And yet others were below ground, within the river waters, or grouped seemingly a hundred feet beneath the street levels.

Fantastic army of wraiths! In the daylight they almost faded, but at night they glowed clearly. Busy assembling their weapons of war. Vanishing and reappearing at different points. Climbing or descending the steep cliffs and crags of their terrain to new points of vantage; and every hour with their numbers augmenting. And all so silent! So grimly purposeful, and yet so ghastly silent!

It was near midnight of May 19th when the wraiths began materializing and the attack upon New York City began!

CHAPTER VII

The Invisible World

Tako showed us how to operate the transition mechanism. The little banana grove on the Bermuda hilltop began fading. There was a momentary shock; a reeling of my head; a sudden sense of vibration within me. And then a feeling of lightness, weightlessness; and freedom, as though all my earthly life I had been shackled, but now was free.

The thing was at first terrifying, gruesome; but in a moment those feelings passed and the weightless freedom brought an exuberance of spirit.

Don and I were sitting with Jane between us, and the figure of Tako fronting us. I recall that we clung together, terrified. I closed my eyes when the first shock came, but opened them again to find my head steadying. Surprising vista! I had vaguely fancied that Tako, Jane and Don would be sitting here dissolving into apparitions. But my hands on Jane's arm felt it as solid as before. I stared into her face. It was frightened, white and set, but smiling at me.

"You all right, Bob? It's not so difficult, is it?"

She had endured this before. She reached out her hands, one to Don and one to me.

"We're dropping. I don't think it's far down, but be careful. Straighten your legs under you."

We seemed unchanged; Don and Jane were the same in aspect as before, save the color of their garments seemed to have faded to a gray. It was the Bermuda hilltop which to our vision was changing. The grove was melting, turning from green and brown to a shimmering silver. We now looked upon ghostly, shadowy trees; fading outlines of the nearby house; the nearby figures of Tako's men and the group of captive girls—all shadowy apparitions. The voices were fading; a silence was falling upon us with only the hum of the mechanism sounding in my ears.

* * * * *

I felt with a shock of surprise that I was no longer seated on the ground. I seemed, for an instant floating, suspended as though perhaps immersed in water. The sweep of the ground level was a vague shadowy line of gray, but my legs had dropped beneath it. I was drifting down, sinking, with only Jane's hand to steady me.

"Thrust your feet down," she murmured. "A little fall. We want to land on our feet."

The imponderable ground of the banana grove was rising. We dropped, as though we were sinking in water. But we gathered speed; we felt a weight coming to our bodies. At last we fell; my feet struck a solid surface with a solid impact. Don and I lost our balance, but Jane steadied us. We were standing upon a dark rock slope, steeply inclined.

"Off with the current!" came Tako's voice. "The belt switch—throw it back!"

I found the little lever. The current went off. There had been a moment when the spectral shadows of my own world showed in the air above me. But we passed their visible limits and they faded out of sight.

We were in the realm of the Fourth Dimension. Outdoors, in a region of glow-

ing, phosphorescent night....

* * * * *

"This way," said Tako. "It is not far. We will walk. Just a moment, you three. I would not have you escape me."

Our revolvers were gone. Being metal, they could not, of actuality, be carried into the transition. We had no light-beam cylinders, nor did we as yet know how to use them. Tako stood before us; he reached to the operating mechanisms under the dial-face at our belts, making some disconnections which we did not understand.

His smile in the semi-darkness showed with its familiar irony. "You might have the urge to try some escaping transition. It would lose you in the Unknown. That would be death! I do not want that."

I protested, "We are not fools. I told you if you would spare us, return us safely to Bermuda when this is over—"

"That you might be of help to me," he finished. "Well, perhaps you will. I hope so. You will do what you can to help, willingly or otherwise; that I know." His voice was grimly menacing. And he laughed sardonically. "You are no fools, as you say. And Jane—" His glance went to her. "Perhaps, before we are through with this, you may even like me, Jane."

Whatever was in his mind, it seemed to amuse him.

"Perhaps," said Jane.

We three had had only a moment to talk together. There had been no possibility of escape. It was obvious to us that Tako was the leader of these invaders; and, whatever they were planning, our best chance to frustrate it was to appear docile. Safety for us—the possibility of later escaping—all of that seemed to lie in a course of docility. We would pretend friendliness; willingness to help.

Tako was not deceived. We knew that. Don, in those two or three hours we were with Tako before starting upon the transition, had said:

"But suppose we do help you in your scheme, whatever it is? There might be some reward for us, eh? If you plan a conquest, riches perhaps—"

Tako had laughed with genuine amusement. "So? You bargain? We are to be real friends—fellow conquerors? And you expect me to believe that?"

* * * * *

Yet now he seemed half to like us. And there was Jane's safety for which we were scheming. Tako had been interested in Jane. We knew that. Yet she was at first little more to him than one of the girl captives. He might have left her with those others. But she was with us now, to stay with us upon this journey, and it was far preferable.

"This way," said Tako. "We will walk. It is not far to my encampment where

they are preparing for the trip."

It seemed that a vast open country was around us. A rocky, almost barren waste; a mountainous region of steep gray defiles, gorges and broken tumbled ravines. A void of darkness hung overhead. There were no stars, no moon, no light from above. Yet I seemed presently to see a great distance through the glowing deep twilight. The glow was inherent to the rocks themselves; and to the spare, stunted, gray-blue vegetation. It was a queerly penetrating, diffused, yet vague light everywhere. One could see a considerable distance by it. Dim colors were apparent.

We trod the rocks with a feeling of almost normal body weight. The air was softly warm like a night in the tropics, with a faint breeze against our faces. It seemed a trackless waste here. We mounted an ascending ramp, topped a rise with an undulating plateau ahead of us.

Tako stood a moment for us to get our breath. The air seemed rarefied; we were panting, with our cheeks tingling.

"My abode is there." He gestured to the distant lowland region behind us. We were standing upon a gray hilltop. The ground went down a tumbled broken area to what seemed a lowland plain. Ten miles away—it may have been that, or twice that—I saw the dim outline of a great castle or a fortress. A building of gigantic size, it seemed strangely fashioned with round-shaped domes heaped in a circle around a tower looming in the center. A wall, or a hedge of giant trees, I could not tell, but it seemed as gigantic as the wall of China, and was strung over the landscape in an irregular circle to enclose an area of several square miles, with the castle-fortress in its center. A little city was there, nestled around the fortress—a hundred or two small brown and gray mounds to mark the dwellings. It suggested a little feudal town of the Middle Ages of our own Earth, set here in this trackless waste.

* * * * *

And I saw, down on the plain, a shining ribbon of river with thick vegetation along its banks. And within the enclosing wall there, was the silvery sheen of a lake near the town; patches of trees, and brownish oval areas which seemed to be fields under cultivation.

"My domain," Tako repeated. There was a touch of pride in his voice. "I rule it. You shall see it—when we are finished with New York."

Again his gaze went to Jane, curiously contemplative. We started walking over the upper plateau level, seemingly with nothing in advance of us save empty luminous darkness. A walk of an hour. Perhaps it was that long. Time here had faded with our Earthly world. It was difficult to gauge the passing minutes—as difficult as to guess at the miles of this luminous distance.

As though the sight of his fortress—his tiny principality, whose inhabitants he

ruled with absolute sway—had awakened in Tako new emotions, he put Jane beside him and began talking to us with apparent complete frankness. It must have been an hour, during which he explained this world of his, of which we were destined to have so brief a glimpse, and told us upon what diabolical errand he and his fellows were embarked. I recall that as he talked Jane gripped me in horror. But she managed to smile when Tako smiled at her. He was naively earnest as he told us of his coming conquest. And Jane, with woman's intuition knew before Don and I realized it, that it was to herself, a beautiful girl of Earth, he was talking, seeking her admiration for his prowess.

Tako was what in Europe of the Middle Ages would have amounted to a feudal prince. He was one of many here in this realm; each had his little domain, with his retainers cultivating his land, paying fees to him so that the overlord lived in princely idleness.

* * * * *

Scattered at considerable distances, one from the other, these rulers of their little principalities were loosely bound into a general government; but at home each was a law unto himself. They lived in princely fashion, these lords of the castle, as they were called. Among the retainers, monogamy was practiced. The workers had their little families—husband, wife and children. But for the rulers, more than one wife was the rule. Within each castle was a harem of beauties, drawn perforce from the common people. The most beautiful girls of each settlement were trained from childhood to anticipate the honor of being selected by the master for a life in the castle.

They were connoisseurs of woman's beauty, these overlords. By the size of his harem and the beauty and talent of its inmates was an overlord judged by his fellows.

Out of this had grown the principal cause for war in the history of the realm. Beautiful girls were scarce. Raids were made by one lord upon the village and harem of another.

Then had come to Tako the discovery of the great world of our Earth, occupying much of this same space in another state of matter.

"I discovered it," he said with his gaze upon Jane.

"How?" Don demanded.

"It came," he said, "out of our scientific method of transportation, which very soon I will show you. We are a scientific people. Hah!" He laughed ironically. "The workers say that we princes are profligate—that we think only of women and music. But that is not so. Once, many generations ago, we were a tremendous nation, and skilled in science far beyond your own world—and with a population a hundred times what we have now. The land everywhere must have been rich and fertile. There were big cities—the ruins of them are still to be seen.

* * * * *

"And then our climate changed. There was, for us, a world catastrophe, the cause and the details of which no one now knows very clearly. It sent our cities, our great civilizations into ruins. It left us with this barren waste with only occasional lowland fertile spots which now by heredity we rulers control, each to possess his own.

"But that past civilization gave us a scientific knowledge. Much of it is lost—we are going down hill. But we have some of it left, and we profligate rulers, as the workers call us, cherish it. But what is the use of teaching it to the common people? We do very little of that. And our weapons of war we keep to ourselves—except when there is a raid and our loyal retainers go forth with us to do battle."

"So you discovered how to get into our Earth world?" Don repeated.

"Yes. Some years ago, and it was quite by chance. At first I experimented alone—and then I took with me a young girl."

Again he smiled at Jane. "Tolla is her name. She is here in our camp where our army is now, starting for New York. You will meet her presently. She loves me very much, so she says. She wants some day to lead my harem. I took her with me into the Unknown—into that place you call Bermuda. I have been there off and on for nearly a year of your Earth time, making my plans for what now is at last coming to pass."

"So that's how you learned our language?" I said.

"Yes. It came easy to me and Tolla. That—and we were taught by two girls whom a year ago I took from Bermuda and brought in here."

"And what became of them?" Jane put in quietly.

"Oh—why, I gave them away," he replied calmly. "A prince whose favor I desired, wanted them and I gave them to him. Your Earth girls are well liked by the men of my world. Their fame has already spread."

* * * * *

He added contemplatively, "I often have thought how strange it is that your great world and mine should lie right here together—the one invisible to the other. Two or three minutes of time—we have just made the transition. Yet what a void!"

"The scientists of your past civilization," I said, "strange that they did not learn to cross it."

"Do you know that they did not?" he demanded. "Perhaps with secret visitations—"

It brought to us a new flood of ideas. We had thought, up there in St. Georges, that this Tako was a ghost. How could one say but that all or most manifestations of the occult were not something like this. The history of our Earth abounds with superstition. Ghosts—things unexplained. How can one tell but that all occultism

is merely unknown science? Doubtless it is. I can fancy now that in the centuries of the past many scientists of this realm of the Fourth Dimension ventured forth a little way toward our world. And seeing them, we called them ghosts.

What an intrepid explorer was this Tako! An enterprising scoundrel, fired with a lust for power. He told us now, chuckling with the triumph of it, how carefully he had studied our world. Appearing there, timidly at first, then with his growing knowledge of English, boldly living in Hamilton.

His fame in his own world, among his fellow rulers, rapidly grew. The few Earth girls he produced were eagerly seized. The fame of their beauty spread. The desire, the competition for them became keen. And Tako gradually conceived his great plan. A hundred or more of the overlords, each with his hundred retainers, were banded together for the enterprise under Tako's leadership. An army was organized; weapons and equipment were assembled.

Earth girls were to be captured in large numbers. The most desirable of them would go into the harems of the princes. The others would be given to the workers. The desire for them was growing rapidly, incited by the talk of the overlords. The common man could have more than one wife—two, even three perhaps—supported by the princely master. And Tako was dreaming of a new Empire; increased population; some of the desert reclaimed; a hundred principalities banded together into a new nation, with himself as its supreme leader.

* * * * *

And then the attack upon Earth had begun. A few Earth girls were stolen; then more, until very quickly it was obvious that a wider area than Bermuda was needed. Tako's mind flung to New York—greatest center of population within striking distance of him.[3] The foray into Bermuda—the materialization of that little band on the Paget hilltop was more in the nature of an experiment than a real attack. Tako learned a great deal of the nature of this coming warfare, or thought he did.

[3] The extent of the Fourth Dimensional world was never made wholly clear to us. Its rugged surface was coincident with the surface of our earth at Bermuda, at New York City, and at many points along the Atlantic seaboard of the United States. For the rest, there is no data upon which one may even guess.

As a matter of actuality, in spite of his dominating force, the capacity for leadership which radiated from him, there was a very naive, fatuous quality to this strange ruler. Or at least, Don and I thought so now. As the details of his plot against our Earth world unfolded to us, what we could do to circumvent him ran like an undercurrent across the background of our consciousness. He knew nothing, or almost nothing of our Earth weapons. What conditions would govern this unprecedented warfare into which he was plunging—of all that he was totally ignorant.

* * * * *

But, we were speedily to learn that he was not as fatuous as he at first seemed.

These two worlds—occupying the same space and invisible to each other—would be plunged into war. And Tako realized that no one, however astute, of either world could predict what might happen. He was plunging ahead, quite conscious of his ignorance. And he realized that there was a vast detailed knowledge of the Earth world which we had and he did not. He would use us as the occasion arose to explain what might not be understandable to him.

I could envisage now so many things of such a character. The range of warships and artillery. The weapons a plane might use. The topography of New York City and its environs.... And the more Tako needed us, the less we had to fear from him personally. We would have the power to protect Jane from him—if we could sufficiently persuade him he needed our good will. Ultimately we might plunge his enterprise into disaster, and with Jane escape from him—that too I could envisage as a possibility.

The mind flings far afield very rapidly! But I recall that it occurred to me also that I might be displaying many of the fatuous qualities I was crediting to Tako, by thinking such thoughts!

I have no more than briefly summarized the many things Tako told us during that hour while we strode across the dim rocky uplands toward his mobilized army awaiting its departure for the scene of the main attack. Some of his forces had already gone ahead. Several bands of men were making visual contact with the seacoast of the southern United States. It was all experimentation. They were heading for New York. They would wait there, and not materialize until this main army had joined them.

We saw presently, in the distance ahead of us, a dim green sheen of light below the horizon. Then it disclosed itself to be quite near—the reflection of green light from a bowl-like depression of this rocky plateau.

We reached the rim of the bowl. The encampment of Tako's main army lay spread before us.

CHAPTER VIII

The Flight through the Fourth Dimension

"This is the girl, Tolla," said Tako quietly. "She will take care of you, Jane, and make you comfortable on this trip."

In the dull green sheen which enveloped the encampment, this girl of the Fourth Dimension stood before us. She had greeted Tako quietly in their own language, but as she gazed up into his face it seemed that the anxiety for his welfare turned to joy at having him safely arrive. She was a small girl; as small as Jane, and probably no older. Her slim figure stood revealed, garbed in the same white woven garments as those worn by the men. At a little distance she might have been a boy of Earth, save that her silvery white hair was wound in a high conical pile on her

head, and there were tasseled ornaments on her legs and arms.

Her small oval face, as it lighted with pleasure at seeing Tako, was beautiful. It was delicate of feature; the eyes pale blue; the lips curving and red. Yet it was a curious face, by Earth standards. It seemed that there was an Oriental slant to the eyes; the nose was high-bridged; the eyebrows were thin pencil lines snow-white, and above each of them was another thin line of black, which evidently she had placed there to enhance her beauty.

Strange little creature! She was the only girl of this world we were destined to meet; she stood beside Jane, seemingly so different, and yet, we were to learn, so humanly very much the same. Her quiet gaze barely touched Don and me; but it clung to Jane and became inscrutable.

"We will travel together," Tako said. "You make her comfortable, Tolla."

"I will do my best," she said; her voice was soft, curiously limpid. "Shall I take her now to our carrier?"

"Yes."

It gave me a pang to see Jane leave with her; Don shot me a sharp, questioning glance but we thought it best to raise no objection.

"Come," said Tako. "Stay close by me. We will be in the carrier presently."

* * * * *

There was an area here in the bowl-like depression of at least half a mile square upon which an assemblage of some five thousand or more men were encamped. It was dark, though an expanse of shifting shadows and dull green light mingled with the vague phosphorescent sheen from the rocks. The place when we arrived was a babble of voices, a confusion of activity. The encampment, which obviously was temporary—perhaps a mobilization place—rang with the last minute preparations for departure. Whatever habitations had been here now were packed and gone.

Tako led us past groups of men who were busy assembling and carrying what seemed equipment of war toward a distant line of oblong objects into which men were now marching.

"The carriers," said Tako. He greeted numbers of his friends, talking to them briefly, and then hurried us on. All these men were dressed similarly to Tako, but I saw none so tall, nor so commanding of aspect. They all stared at Don and me hostilely, and once or twice a few of them gathered around us menacingly. But Tako waved them away. It brought me a shudder to think of Jane crossing this camp. But we had watched Tolla and Jane starting and Tolla had permitted none to approach them.

"Keep your eyes open," Don whispered. "Learn what you can. We've got to watch our chance—" We became aware that Tako was listening. Don quickly

added, "I say, Bob, what does he mean—carriers?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. Ask him."

We would have to be more careful; it was obvious that Tako's hearing was far keener than our own. He was fifteen feet away, but he turned his head at once.

"A carrier you would call in Bermuda a tram. Or a train, let us say." He was smiling ironically at our surprise that he had overheard us. He gestured to the distant oblong objects. "We travel in them. Come, there is really nothing for me to do; all is in readiness here."

* * * * *

The vehicles stood on a level rocky space at the farther edge of the camp. I think, of everything I had seen in this unknown realm, the sight of these vehicles brought the most surprise. The glimpse we had had of Tako's feudal castle seemed to suggest primitiveness.

But here was modernity—super-modernity. The vehicles—there were perhaps two dozen of them—were all apparently of similar character, differing only in size.

They were long, low oblongs. Some were much the size and shape of a single railway car; others twice as long; and several were like a very long train, not of single joined cars, but all one structure. They lay like white serpents on the ground—dull aluminum in color with mound-shaped roofs slightly darker. Rows of windows in their sides with the interior greenish lights, stared like round goggling eyes into the night.

When we approached closer I saw that the vehicles were not of solid structure, but that the sides seemingly woven of wire-mesh—or woven of thick fabric strands.[4]

[4] The vehicles were constructed of a material allied in character to that used for garments by the people of this realm. It was not metal, but an organic vegetable substance.

The army of white figures crowded around the vehicles. Boxes, white woven cases, projectors and a variety of disks and dials and wire mechanisms were being loaded aboard. And the men were marching in to take their places for the journey.

Tako gestured. "There is our carrier."

It was one of the smallest vehicles—low and streamlined, so that it suggested a fat-bellied cigar, white-wrapped. It stood alone, a little apart from the others, with no confusion around it. The green-lighted windows in its sides goggled at us.

* * * * *

We entered a small porte at its forward pointed end. The control room was here, a small cubby of levers and banks of dial-faces. Three men, evidently the operators, sat within. They were dressed like Tako save that they each had a great

round lens like a monocle on the left eye, with dangling wires from it leading to dials fastened to the belt.

Tako greeted them with a gesture and a gruff word and pushed us past them into the car. We entered a low narrow white corridor with dim green lights in its vaulted room. Sliding doors to compartments opened from one side of it. Two were closed; one was partly open. As we passed, Tako called softly:

"All is well with you, Tolla?"

"Yes," came the girl's soft voice.

I met Don's gaze. I stopped short and called:

"Are you all right, Jane?"

I was immensely relieved as she answered, "Yes, Bob."

Tako shoved me roughly. "You presume too much."

The corridor opened into one main room occupying the full ten-foot width of the vehicle and its twenty-foot middle section. Low soft couch seats were here, and a small table with food and drink upon it; and on another table low to the floor, with a mat-seat beside it, a litter of small mechanical devices had been deposited. I saw among them two or three of the green-light hand weapons.

Tako followed my gaze and laughed. "You are transparent. If you knew how to use those weapons, do you think I would leave them near you?"

We were still garbed in the white garments, but the disks and wires and helmet had been taken from us.

"I say, you needn't be so suspicious," Don protested. "We're not so absolutely foolish. But if you want any advice from us on how to attack New York, you've got to explain how your weapons are used."

* * * * *

Tako seated us. "All in good time. We shall have opportunity now to talk."

"About the trip—" I said. "Are we going to New York City?"

"Yes."

"How long will it take?"

"Long? That is difficult to say. Have you not noticed that time in my world has little to do with yours?"

"How long will it seem?" I persisted.

He shrugged. "That is according to your mood. We shall eat once or twice, and get a little sleep."

One of the window openings was beside us with a loosely woven mesh of wires across it. Outside I could see the shifting lights. Men were embarking in the other vehicles; and the blended noise from them floated in to us.

Questions flooded me. This strange journey, what would it be like? I could

envisage the invisible little Bermuda in the void of darkness over us now; or here in this same space around us. No, we had climbed from where we landed in the space close under the Paget hilltop. And we had walked forward for perhaps an hour. The space of Bermuda would be behind us and lower down. This then was the open ocean. I gazed at the solid rocky surface outside our window. Nearly seven hundred miles away must be New York City. We were going there. How? Would it be called flying? Or following this rocky surface?

As though to answer my thoughts Tako gestured to the window. "See. The first carrier starts away."

The carrier lay like a stiff white reptile on the ground. Its doors were closed, and watching men stood back from it.

Don gasped, "Why—it's fading! A transition!"

* * * * *

It glowed along all its length and grew tenuous of aspect, until in a moment that solid thing which had been solidly resting there on a rock was a wraith of vehicle. A great oblong apparition—the ghost of a reptile with round green spots on its sides. A fading wraith. But it did not quite disappear. Hovering just within visibility, it slowly, silently slid forward. It seemed, without changing its level, to pass partly through an upstanding crag which stood in its path. Distance dimmed it, dwindled it; and in a moment it was gone into the night.

"We will start," said Tako abruptly. "Sit where you are. There will be a little shock, much like the transition coming in from your world." He called, "Tolla, we start."

A signal-dial was on the room wall near him. He rose and pressed its lever. There was a moment of silence. Then the current went on. It permeated every strand of the material of which the vehicle was constructed. It contacted with our bodies. I felt the tingle of it; felt it running like fire through my veins. The whole interior was humming. There was a shock to my senses, swiftly passing, followed by a sense of weightless freedom. But that lightness was an illusion, a comparison with externals only, for the seat to which I clung remained solid, and my body pressed upon it with a feeling of normal weight.

Outside the window, the dark scene of rocks and vehicles and men was fading; turning ghostly, shadowy, spectral. But it did not quite vanish; it held its wraith-like outlines, and in a moment began sliding silently backward. It seemed that we also passed through a little butte of rocks. Then we emerged again into the open; and, as we gathered speed, the vague spectral outlines of a rocky landscape slid past us in a bewildering panorama.

We were away upon the journey.[5]

[5] What we learned of the science of the invisible realm was perforce picked piecemeal by us from all that we saw, experienced, and what several different

times Tako was willing to explain to us. And it was later studied by the scientists of our world, whose additional theories I can incorporate into my own knowledge. Yet much of it remains obscure. And it is so intricate a subject that even if I understood it fully I could do no more than summarize here its fundamental principles.

The space-transition of these vehicles, Tako had already told us, was closely allied to the transition from his world to ours. And the weapons were of the same principles. The science of space-transition, limited to travel from one portion of the realm to another, quite evidently came first. The weapons, the forcible, abrupt transition of material objects out of the realm into other dimensions—into the Unknown—this principle was developed from the traveling. And from them both Tako himself evolved the safe and controlled transition from his world to ours.

Concerning the operation of these vehicles: Motion, in our Earth-world or any other, is the progressive change of a material object in relation to its time and space. It is here now, but it was there. Both space and time undergo a simultaneous change; the object itself remains unaltered, save in its position.

In the case of the vehicles, the current I have already mentioned (used in the mechanism for the transition from Earth to the other realm) that current, circulating in the organic material of which the vehicle was composed, altered the state of matter of the carrier and everything within the aura of the current's field. The vehicle and all its contents, with altered inherent vibratory rate of its molecules, atoms and electrons, was in effect projected into another world. A new dimension was added to it. It became an imponderable wraith, resting dimly visible in a sort of borderland upon the fringe of its own world.

Yet it had not changed position. It still remained quiescent. Then the current was further altered, and the time and space co-ordinates set into new combinations. This change of the current was a progressive change. Controlled and carefully calculated by what intricate theoretic principles and practical mechanisms no scientist of our world can yet say.

It is clear, however, that as this progressive change in space-time characteristics began, the vehicle perforce must move slightly in space and time to reconcile itself to the change.

There never has been a seemingly more abstruse subject for the human mind to grasp than the theories involving a true conception of space-time. Yet, doubtless, to those of Tako's realm, inheriting, let me say, the consciousness of its reality, there was nothing abstruse about it.

An analogy may make it clearer. The vehicle, hovering in the borderland, might be called in a visible but gaseous state. A solid can be turned to gas merely by the alteration of the vibratory rate of its molecules.

This unmoving (gaseous) vehicle, is now further altered in space-time characteristics. Suppose we say it is very slightly thrown out of tune with its spatial

surroundings at the time which is its present. Nature will allow no such disorganization. The vehicle, as a second of time passes, is impelled by the force of nature to be in a different place. This involves motion. A small change in the first second. Then the current alters it progressively faster. The change, of necessity, is progressively greater, the motion more rapid.

And this, controlled as to direction, became transportation. The determination of direction at first thought seems amazingly intricate. In effect, that was not so. With space-time factors set as a destination, i. e., the place where the vehicle must end its change at a certain time, all the intermediate changes become automatic. With every passing second it must be at a reconcilable place—the direction of its passage perforce being the shortest path between the two.

With this in mind, the transition from one world to another becomes more readily understandable. No natural change of space is involved, merely the change of the state of matter. It was the same change as that which carried the vehicles into a shadowy borderland, and then pushed further into new dimensional realms.

The green light-beam weapons were merely another application of the same principle. The characteristics of the green light current, touching organic matter, altered the vibratory rate of what was struck to coincide with the light. A solid cake of ice under a blow-torch becomes steam by the same principle. The light-beams were swift and violent in their action. The change in them was progressive also—but it was so swiftly violent a change that nothing living could survive the shock of the enforced transition.

* * * * *

There was little to see during this strange flight. Outside our windows gray shadows drifted swiftly past—a shadowy, ghostly landscape of gray rocks. Sometimes it was below us, so that we seemed in an airship winging above it. Then abruptly it would rise over us and we plunged into it as though it were a mere light-image, a mirage.

Hours passed. For the most part the shadowy void seemed a jagged mountainous terrain, a barren waste. There were great plateau uplands, one of which rose seemingly thousands of feet over us. And there was perhaps an hour of time when the surface of the world had dropped far away, so far down that it was gone in the distance. Like a projectile we sped level, unswerving. And at last the shadows of the landscape came up again. And occasionally we saw shadowy inhabited domains—enclosing walls around water and vegetation, with a frowning castle and its brood of mound-shaped little houses like baby chicks clustered around the mother hen.

Tako served us with a meal; it was strange food, but our hunger made it palatable. Jane and Tolla remained in their nearby cabin. We did not see them, but occasionally Don or I, ignoring Tako's frown, called out to Jane, and received her

ready answer.

Occasionally also, we had an opportunity to question Tako. He had begun tell us the general outline of his plans. The important fact was that the army would mobilize just within visibility of New York.

"Nothing can touch us then," Tako said. "You will have to explain what weapons will be used against me. Particularly the long-range weapons are interesting. But you have no weapons which could penetrate into the shadows of the borderland, have you?"

"No," said Don. "But your weapons—" He tried not to seem too intent. "Look here, Tako, I don't just understand how you intend to conquer New York."

"Devastate it," Tako interrupted. "Smash it up, and then we can materialize and take possession of it. My object is to capture a great number of young women—beautiful young women."

"How?" I demanded. "By smashing up New York? There are thousands of young women there, but you would kill them in the process. Now if you would try some other locality. For instance, I could direct you to open country—"

* * * * *

He understood my motive. "I ask not that kind of advice. I will capture New York; devastate it. I think then your rulers will be willing voluntarily to yield all the captives I demand. Or, if not, then we will plan to seize them out of other localities."

Don said, "Suppose you tell us more clearly just how you expect to smash New York, as you call it. First, you will gather, not materialized, but only visible to the city."

"Exactly. That will cause much excitement, will it not? Panics—terror. And if we are only wraiths, no weapons of your world can attack us."

"Nor can yours attack the city. Can they?"

He did not at first answer that; and then he smiled. "Our hand light-projectors could not penetrate out from the borderland without losing their force. But we have bombs. You shall see.[6] The bombs alone will devastate New York, if we choose to use them. I have also a long-range projector of the green light-beam. It is my idea, when the city is abandoned by the enemy that we can take possession of some prominent point of vantage. A tall building, perhaps." He smiled again his quiet grim smile. "We will select one and be careful to leave it standing. I will materialize with our giant projector, dominate all the region and then we can barter with your authorities. It is your long-range guns I most fear. When the projector is materialized—and we are ready to bargain—then your airplanes, warships lying far away perhaps, might attack. Suppose now you explain those weapons to me."

[6] Materialization bombs, we afterward called them; they played a diabolical part in the coming events. They were of many sizes and shapes, but most of them were small in size and shape, like a foot-long wedged-shaped brick, or the head of an ax. They were constructed of organic material, with a wire mesh of the transition mechanism encasing them, and an automatic operating device like the firing fuse of a bomb.

* * * * *

For an hour or more he questioned us. He was no fool, this fellow; he knew far more of the conditions ahead of him than we realized. I recall that once I said:

"You have never been in New York?"

"No. Not materialized. But I have observed it very carefully."

As a lurking ghost!

"We have calculated," he went on, "the space co-ordinates with great precision. That is how we have been able to select the destination for this carrier now. You cannot travel upon impulse by this method. Our engineers, as you might call them, must go in advance with recording apparatus. Nothing can be done blindly."

It brought to my mind the three pilots now operating our vehicle. I mentioned the lens on their left eyes like a monocle.

"With that they can see ahead of us a great distance. It flings the vision—like gazing along a beam of light—to space-time factors in advance of our present position. In effect, a telescope."

* * * * *

There were a few hours of the journey when Don and I slept, exhausted by what we had been through. Tako was with us when we dozed off, and I recall that he was there when we awakened. How much time passed we could not tell.

"You are refreshed?" he said smilingly. "And hungry again, no doubt. We will eat and drink—and soon we will arrive at the predestined time and place."

We were indeed hungry again. And while we were eating Tako gestured to the window. "Look there. Your world seems visible a little."

Just before we slept it had seemed that mingled with the shadows of Tako's world was the gray outline of an ocean surface beneath us. I gazed out at the dim void now. Our flight was far slower than before. We were slackening speed for the coming halt. And I saw now that the shadows outside were the mingled wraiths of two spectral worlds, with us drifting forward between and among them. The terrain of Tako's world was bleaker, more desolate and more steeply mountainous than ever. There were pits and ravines and gullies with jagged mountain spires, cliffs and towering gray masses of rock.

And mingled with it, in a general way coincidental with it in the plane of the same space, we could see now the tenuous shapes of our own world. Vague, but

familiar outlines! We had passed Sandy Hook! The ocean lay behind us. A hundred feet or so beneath us was the level water of the Lower Bay.

"Don!" I murmured. "Look there! Long Island off there! And that's Staten Island ahead of us!"

"Almost at our destination," Tako observed. And in a moment he gestured again. "There is your city. Have a good look at your dear New York."

* * * * *

Diagonally ahead through the window we saw the spectres of the great pile of masonry on lower and mid-Manhattan. Spectres of the giant buildings; the familiar skyline, and mingled with it the ghostly gray outlines of the mountains and valley depths of Tako's world. All intermingled! The mountain peaks rose far higher than the tallest of New York's skyscrapers; and the pits and ravines were lower than the waters of the harbor and rivers, lower than the subways and the tubes and the tunnels.

"Another carrier!" Don said abruptly. "See it off there!"

It showed like a great gray projectile coming in level with us. And then we saw two others in the distance behind us. Fantastic, ghostly arrival of the enemy! Weird mobilization here within the space of the doomed New York.

"Can they see us?" I murmured. "Tako, the people down there on Staten Island—can they see us?"

"Yes," he smiled. "Don't you think so? Look! Are not those ships of war? Hah! Gathered already—awaiting our coming!"

I have already given a brief summary of the events of the days and nights just past here in New York. The terror at the influx of apparitions. The panic of the city's teeming millions struggling too eagerly to escape.

It was night now—the night of May 19th. The city was in chaos, but none of the details were apparent to us as we arrived. But we could see, as we drifted with slow motion above the waters of the harbor, that there were warships anchored here, and in the Hudson River. They showed as little spectral dots of gray. And in the air, level with us at times, the wraiths of encircling airplanes were visible.

"They see us," Tako repeated.

They did indeed. A puff of light and up-rolling smoke came from one of the ships. A silent shot. Perhaps it screamed through us, but we were not aware of it.

Tako chuckled. "They get excited, do they not? We strike terror—are they going to fight like excited children?"

* * * * *

We were under sudden bombardment. Fort Wadsworth was firing; puffs showed from several of the warships; and abruptly a group of ghostly monoplanes dove at us like birds. They went through us, emerged and sped away. And in a

moment the shots were discontinued.

"That is better," said Tako. "What a waste of ammunition."

Our direction was carrying us from mid-Manhattan. The bridges to Brooklyn were visible. Beyond them, over New York, mingled with teeming buildings was a mountain slope of Tako's realm. I saw one of our carriers lying on a ledge of it.

A sudden commotion in our car brought our attention from the scene outside. The voices of girls raised in anger. Tolla's voice and Jane's! Then came the sound of a scuffle!

"By what gods!" Tako exclaimed.

We all leaped to our feet. Tako rushed for the door of the compartment with us after him. We burst in upon the girls. They were standing in the center of the little room. One of the chairs was overturned. Jane stood gripping Tolla by the wrists, and with greater strength was forcibly holding her.

As we appeared, Jane abruptly released her, and Tolla sank to the floor and burst into wild sobs. Jane faced us, red and white of face, and herself almost in tears.

"What's the matter?" Don demanded. "What is it?"

But against all our questionings both girls held to a stubborn silence.

CHAPTER IX

A Woman Scorned

Jane afterward told us just what happened in that compartment of the carrier, and I think that for the continuity of my narration I had best relate it now.

The cubby room was small, not much over six feet wide, and twelve feet long. There was a single small door to the corridor, and two small windows. A couch stood by them; there were two low chairs, and a small bench-like table.

Tolla made Jane as comfortable as possible. Food was at hand; Tolla, after an hour or two served it at the little table, eating the meal with Jane, and sitting with her on the couch where they could gaze through the windows.

To Jane this girl of another world was at once interesting, surprising and baffling. Jane could only look upon her as an enemy. In Jane's mind there was no thought save that we must escape, and frustrate Tako's attack upon New York; and she was impulsive, youthful enough to think something might be contrived.

At all events, she saw Tolla in the light of an enemy who might be tricked into giving information.

Jane admits that her ideas were quite as vague as our own when it came to planning anything definite.

She at first studied Tolla, who seemed as young as herself and perhaps in her own world, was as beautiful. And within an hour or two she was surprised at Tolla's

friendliness. They had dined together, gazed through the windows at the speeding shadows of the strange world sliding past; they had dozed together on the couch. During all this they could have been schoolgirl friends. Not captor and captive upon these strange weird circumstances of actuality, but friends of one world. And in outward aspect Tolla could fairly well have been a cultured girl of our Orient.

* * * * *

Then Jane got a shock. She tried careful questions. And Tolla skillfully avoided everything that touched in any way upon Tako's future plans. Yet her apparent friendliness, and a certain girlish volubility continued.

And then, at one point, Tolla asked:

"Are you beautiful in Bermuda?"

"Why, yes," said Jane. "I guess so."

"I am beautiful in my world. Tako has said so."

"You love him, don't you?" Jane said abruptly.

"Yes. That is true." There was no hint of embarrassment. Her pale blue eyes stared at Jane, and she smiled a little quizzically. "Does it show so quickly upon my face that you saw it at once? I am called Tolla because I am pledged soon to enter Tako's harem."

Upon impulse Jane put her arm around the other girl as they sat on the couch. "I think he is very nice."

But she saw it was an error. The shadow of a frown came upon Tolla's face; a glint of fire clouded her pale, serene eyes.

"He will be the greatest man of his world," she said quietly.

* * * * *

There was an awkward silence. "The harem, I am told," Jane said presently, "is one of your customs." She took a plunge. "And Tako told us why they want our Earth girls. There was one of my friends stolen from Bermuda—"

"And yet you call him very nice," Tolla interrupted with sudden irony. "Girls are frank in our world. But you are not. What did you mean by that?"

"I was trying to be friendly," said Jane calmly. "You had just said you loved him."

"But you do not love him?"

It took Jane wholly back. "Good Heavens, no!"

"But he—might readily love you?"

"I hope not!" Jane tried to laugh, but the idea itself was so frightening to her that the laugh sounded hollow. She gathered her wits. This girl was jealous. Could she play upon that jealousy? Would Tolla perhaps soon want her to escape? The

idea grew. Tolla might even some time soon come to the point of helping her escape.

Jane said carefully, "I suppose I was captured with the idea of going into someone's harem. Was that the idea?"

"I am no judge of men's motives," said Tolla curtly.

"Tako said as much as that," Jane persisted. "But not necessarily into his harem. But if it should be his, why would you care? Your men divide their love—"

"I would care because Tako may give up his harem," Tolla interrupted vehemently. "He goes into this conquest for power—for wealth—because soon he expects to rule all our world and band it together into a nation. He has always told me that I might be his only wife—some day—"

* * * * *

She checked herself abruptly and fell into a stolid silence. It made Jane realize that under the lash of emotion Tolla would talk freely. But Jane could create no further opportunity then, for Tako suddenly appeared at their door. The girls had been together now some hours. Don and I were at this time asleep.

He stood now at the girl's door. "Tolla, will you go outside a moment? I want to talk to this prisoner alone." And, interpreting the look which both girls flung at him, he added, "The door remains open. If she wants you back, Tolla, she will call."

Without a word Tolla left the compartment. But Jane saw on her face again a flood of jealousy.

Tako seated himself amiably. "She has made you comfortable?"

"Yes."

"I am glad."

He passed a moment of silence. "Have you been interested in the scene outside the window?" he added.

"Yes. Very."

"A strange sight. It must seem very strange to you. This traveling through my world—"

"Did you come to tell me that?" she interrupted.

He smiled. "I came for nothing in particular. Let us say I came to get acquainted with you. My little prisoner—you do not like me, do you?"

She tried to meet his gaze calmly. This was the first time Jane had had opportunity to regard Tako closely. She saw now the aspect of power which was upon him. His gigantic stature was not clumsy, for there was a lean, lithe grace in his movements. His face was handsome in a strange foreign fashion. He was smiling now; but in the set of his jaw, his wide mouth, there was an undeniable cruelty, a ruthless dominance of purpose. And suddenly she saw the animal-like aspect of him;

a thinking, reasoning, but ruthless, animal.

"You do not like me, do you?" he repeated.

* * * * *

She forced herself to reply calmly, "Why should I? You abduct my friends. There is a girl named Eunice Arton whom you have stolen. Where is she?"[7]

[7] Neither Eunice Arton, nor any of the stolen girls, have ever been heard from since. Like the thousands of men, women and children who met their death in the attack upon New York, Eunice Arton was a victim of these tragic events.

He shrugged. "You could call that the fortunes of war. This is war—"

"And you," she said, "are my enemy."

"Oh, I would not go so far as to say that. Rather would I call myself your friend."

"So that you will return me safely? And also Bob Rivers, and my cousin, Don—you will return us safely as you promised?"

"Did I promise? Are you not prompting words from my lips?"

Jane was breathless from fear, but she tried not to show it.

"What are you going to do with us?" she demanded. There is no woman who lacks feminine guile in dealing with a man; and in spite of her terror Jane summoned it to her aid.

"You want me to like you, Tako?"

"Of course I do. You interest me strangely. Your beauty—your courage—"

"Then if you would be sincere with me—"

"I am; most certainly I am."

"You are not. You have plans for me. I told Tolla I supposed I was destined for someone's harem. Yours?"

It startled him. "Why—" He recovered himself and laughed. "You speak with directness." He suddenly turned solemn. He bent toward her and lowered his voice; his hand would have touched her arm, but she drew away.

"In very truth, ideas are coming to me, Jane. I will be, some day soon, the greatest man of my world. Does that attract you?"

"N-no," she said, stammering.

"I wish that it would," he said earnestly. "I do of reality wish that it would. I will speak plainly, and it is in a way that Tako never spoke to woman before. I have found myself, these last hours, caring very much for your good opinion of me. That is surprising."

* * * * *

She stared at him with sudden fascination mingled with her fear. He seemed for this moment wholly earnest and sincere. An attractive sort of villain, this handsome giant, turned suddenly boyish and naive.

"That is surprising," Tako repeated.

"Is it?"

"Very. That I should care what any woman thinks of me, particularly a captive girl—but I do. And I realize, Jane, that our marriage system is very different from yours. Repugnant to you, perhaps. Is it?"

"Yes," she murmured. His gaze held her; she tried to shake it off, but it held her.

"Then I will tell you this: I have always felt that the glittering luxury of a large harem is in truth a very empty measure of man's greatness. For Tako there will be more manly things. The power of leadership—the power to rule my world. When I got that idea, it occurred to me also that for a man like me there might be some one woman—to stand alone by my side and rule our world."

His hand touched her arm, and though she shuddered, she left it there. Tako added with a soft vibrant tenseness. "I am beginning to think that you are that woman."

There was a sound in the corridor outside the door—enough to cause Tako momentarily to swing his gaze. It broke the spell for Jane; with a shock she realized that like a snake he had been holding her fascinated. His gaze came back at once, but now she shook off his hand from her arm.

"Tolla told me you—you said something like that to her," Jane said with an ironic smile.

It angered him. The earnestness dropped from him like a mask. "Oh, did she? And you have been mocking me, you two girls?"

* * * * *

He stood up, his giant length bringing his head almost to the vaulted ceiling of the little compartment. "What degradation for Tako that women should discuss his heart."

His frowning face gazed down at Jane; there was on it now nothing to fascinate her; instead, his gaze inspired terror.

"We—we said nothing else," she stammered.

"Say what you like. What is it to me? I am a man, and the clatter of women's tongues is no concern of mine."

He strode to the door. From over his shoulder he said, "What I shall do with you I have not yet decided. If Tolla is interested, tell her that."

"Tako, let me—I mean you do not understand—"

But he was gone. Jane sat trembling. A sense of defeat was on her. Worse than that, she felt that she had done us all immeasurable harm. Tako's anger might react upon Don and me. As a matter of fact, if it did he concealed it, for we saw no change in his attitude.

Tolla rejoined Jane within a moment. If Tako spoke to her outside Jane did not know it. But she was at once aware that the other girl had been listening; Tolla's face was white and grim. She came in, busied herself silently about the room.

Jane turned from the window. "You heard us, Tolla?"

"Yes, I heard you! You with your crooked look staring at him—"

"Why, Tolla, I did not!"

"I saw you! Staring at him so that he would think you beautiful! Asking him, with a boldness beyond that of any woman I could ever imagine—asking him if he planned you for his harem!"

* * * * *

She stood over Jane, staring down with blazing eyes. "Oh, I heard you! And I heard him telling you how noble are his motives! One woman, just for him!"

"But, Tolla—"

"Do not lie to me! I heard him sneering at me—telling you of this one woman just for him! And you are that woman! Hah! He thinks that now, does he? He thinks he will make you love him as I love him. As I love him! And what does he know of that! What woman's love can mean!"

"Tolla! Don't be foolish. I didn't—I never had any desire to—"

"What do your desires concern me? He thinks he will win you with tales of his conquests! A great man, this Tako, because he will devastate New York!"

This was the fury of a woman scorned. She was wholly beside herself, her words tumbling, incoherent, beyond her will, beyond her realization of what she was saying.

"A great conquest to make you love him! With his giant projector he will subdue New York! Hah! What a triumph! But it is the weapon's power, not his! He and all his army—these great brave and warlike men—why I alone with that weapon could turn—"

She stopped abruptly. The red flush of frenzied anger drained from her cheeks.

Jane leaped to her feet. "What do you mean? With that giant projector—"

But Tolla was standing frozen, with all her anger gone and horror at what she had said flooding her.

"What do you mean, Tolla?" insisted Jane, seizing her. "What could you do with that giant projector?"

"Let me go!" Tolla tried to jerk away.

"I won't let you go! Tell me what you were going to say!"

"Let me go!" Tolla got one hand loose and struck Jane in the face. But Jane again seized the wrist. In the scuffle they overturned a chair.

"I won't let you go until you—"

And then Tako, Don and I, hearing the uproar, burst in upon them. Jane let go her hold, and Tolla broke into sobs, and sank to the floor.

And both of them were sullen and silent under our questioning.

CHAPTER X

Weird Battleground!

"We have it going very well," said Tako, chuckling. "Don't you think so? Sit here by me. We will stay here for a time now."

Tako had a small flat rock for a table. On it he had spread his paraphernalia for this battle—if battle it could be called. Weird contest! Opposing forces, each imponderable to the other so that no physical contact had yet been made. Tako sat at his rock; giving orders to his leaders who came hurrying up and were away at his command; or speaking orders into his sound apparatus; or consulting his charts and co-ordinates, questioning Don and me at times over the meaning of shadowy things we could see taking place about us.

A little field headquarters our post here might have been termed.[8]

[8] The detailed nature of the scientific devices Tako used in the handling of his army during the attack never has been disclosed. I saw him using one of the eye-telescopes. There was also a telephonic device and occasionally he would discharge a silent signal radiance—a curious intermittent green flare of light. His charts of the topography of New York City were to me incomprehensible hieroglyphics—mathematical formula, no doubt; the co-ordinates of altitudes and contours of our world-space in its relation to the mountainous terrain of his world which stood mingled here with the New York City buildings.

We were grouped now around Tako on a small level ledge of rock. It lay on a broken, steeply ascending ramp of a mountainside. The mountain terraces towered back and above us. In front, two hundred feet down, was a valley of pits and craters; and to the sides a tumbled region of alternating precipitous cliffs and valley depths.

Upon every point of vantage, for two or three miles around us, Tako's men were dispersed. To us, they were solid gray blobs in the luminous darkness. The carriers, all arrived now, stood about a mile from us, and save for their guards, the men had all left them. The weapons were being taken out and carried to various points over the mountains and in the valley depths. Small groups of men—some two hundred in a group—were gathered at many different points, assembling their weapons, and waiting for Tako's orders. Messengers toiled on foot between them, climbing, white figures. Signals flashed.

Fantastic, barbaric scene—it seemed hardly modern. Mountain defiles were swarming with white invaders, making ready, but not yet attacking.

* * * * *

We had had as yet no opportunity of talking alone with Jane since we left the carrier. The incident with Tolla was to us wholly inexplicable. But that it was significant of something, we knew—by Jane's tense white face and the furtive glances she gave us. Don and I were ready to seize the first opportunity to question her.

Tolla, by the command of Tako, stayed close by Jane, and the two girls were always within sight of us. They were here now, seated on the rocks twenty feet from us. And the two guards, whom Tako had appointed at the carrier, sat near us with alert weapons, watching Jane and us closely.[9]

[9] There was a thing which puzzled me before we arrived in the carrier, and surprised me when we left it; and though I did not, and still do not wholly understand it, I think I should mention it here. Traveling in the carrier we were suspended in a condition of matter which might be termed mid way between Tako's realm and our Earth-world. Both, in shadowy form, were visible to us; and to an observer on either world we also were visible.

Then, as the carrier landed, it receded from this sort of borderland as I have termed it, contacted with its own realm and landed. At once I saw that the shadowy outlines of New York were gone. And, to New York observers, the carriers as they landed, were invisible. The mountains—all this tumbled barren wilderness of Tako's world—were invisible to observers in New York.

But I knew now how very close were the two worlds—a very fraction of visible "distance," one from the other.

Then, with wires, disks and helmets—all the transition mechanism worn now by us and all of Tako's forces—we drew ourselves a very small fraction of the way toward the Earth-world state. Enough and no more than to bring it to most tenuous, most wraithlike visibility, so that we could see the shadows of it and know our location in relation to it, which was necessary to Tako's operations.

In this state, New York City was a wraith to us—and we were shadowy, dimly visible apparitions to New York observers. But in this slight transition, we did not wholly disconnect with the terrain of Tako's world. There was undoubtedly—if the term could be called scientific—a depth of field to the solidity of these mountains. By that I mean, their tangibility persisted for a certain distance toward other dimensions. Perhaps it was a greater "depth of field" than the solidity of our world possesses. As to that, I do not know.

But I do know, since I experienced it, that as we sat now encamped upon this ledge, the ground under us felt only a trifle different from when we had full contact with it. There was a lightness upon us—an abnormal feeling of weight-loss—a feeling of indefinable abnormality to the rocks. Yet, to observers in New York, we were faintly to be seen, and the rocks upon which we sat were not.

There was just once after we left the carrier, toiling over the rocks with Tako's

little cortege to this vantage point on the ledge, that Jane found an opportunity of communicating secretly with us.

"Tolla told me something about the giant projector! Something about how it—"

She could say almost nothing but that. "The projector, Bob, if you can only learn how it—"

Tolla was upon us, calling to attract Tako's attention, and Jane moved away.

* * * * *

The giant projector! We had it with us now; a dozen men had laboriously carried it up here. Not yet assembled, it stood here on the ledge—a rectangular gray box about the size and shape of a coffin, encased now in the mesh of transition mechanism. Tako intended to materialize us and that box into the city when the time came, unpack and erect the projector, and with its long range dominate all the surrounding country.

Tolla had almost told Jane something about it! Jane was trying to learn that secret. Or she thought we might learn it from Tako. But of what use if we did? We were helpless, every moment under the eyes of guards whose little hand-beams could in a second annihilate us. When, leaving the carrier, Jane had appeared garbed like the rest of us and we had all been equipped with the transition mechanism which we knew well how to use now, the thought came to me of trying to escape. But it was futile. I could set the switches at my belt to materialize me into New York. But as I faded, the weapons of the guards would have been quick enough to catch me. How could Jane, Don and I simultaneously try a thing like that.

"Impossible!" Don whispered. "Don't do anything wrong. Some chance may come, later."

But with that slight transition over, Tako at once removed from our belts a vital part of the mechanism in order to make it impotent.

An hour passed, here on the ledge, with most of the activity of Tako's men incomprehensible to us.

"You shall see very soon," he chuckled grimly, "I can give the signal to attack—all at once. Look there! They grow very bold, these New York soldiers. They have come to inspect us."

* * * * *

It was night in New York City—about two A.M. of the night of May 19th and 20th. Our mountain ledge was within a store on the east side of Fifth Avenue at 36th Street. We seemed to be but one story above the pavement. The shadowy outlines of a large rectangular room with great lines of show-cases dividing it into wide aisles. I recognized it at once—a jewelry store, one of the best known in the world. A gigantic fortune in jewelry was here, some of it hastily packed in great

steel safes nearby, and some of it abandoned in these show-cases when the panic swept the city a few days previously.

But the jewelry of our world was nothing to these White Invaders. Tako never even glanced at the cases, or knew or cared what sort of a store this was.

The shadowy street of Fifth Avenue showed just below us. It was empty now of vehicles and people, but along it a line of soldiers were gathered. Other stores and ghostly structures lay along Fifth Avenue. And five hundred feet away, diagonally across the avenue, the great Empire State Building, the tallest structure in the entire world, towered like a ghostly Titan into the void above us.

This ghostly city! We could see few details. The people had all deserted this mid-Manhattan now. The stores and hotels and office buildings were empty.

A group of soldiers came into the jewelry store and stood within a few feet of us, peering at us. Yet so great was the void between us that Tako barely glanced at them. He was giving orders constantly now. For miles around us his men on the mountains and in the valleys were feverishly active.

* * * * *

But doing what? Don and I could only wonder. A tenseness had gripped upon Tako. The time for his attack was nearing.

"Very presently now," he repeated. He gestured toward the great apparition of the Empire State Building so near us.

"I am sparing that. A good place for us to mount the projector—up there in that tall tower. You see where our mountain slope cuts through that building? We can materialize with the projector at that point."

The steep ramp of the mountainside upon which we were perched sloped up and cut midway through the Empire State Building. The building's upper portion was free of the mountain whose peaks towered to the west. We could climb from our ledge up the ramp to the small area where it intersected the Empire State at the building's sixtieth to seventieth stories.

The apparitions of New York's soldiers stood in the jewelry store with futile leveled weapons.

"They are wondering what we are doing!" Tako chuckled.

A dozen of Tako's men, unheeding the apparitions, were now busy within a few hundred feet of us down the rocky slope. We saw at close view, what Tako's army was busy doing everywhere. The men had little wedge-shaped objects of a gray material. The materialization bombs! They were placing them carefully at selected points on the rocks, and adjusting the firing mechanisms. This group near us, which Don and I watched with a fascinated horror, were down in the basement of the jewelry store, among its foundations. There for a moment; then moving out under Fifth Avenue, peering carefully at the spectral outlines of the cellars

of other structures.

Then presently Tako called an order. He stood for a moment on the ledge with arms outstretched so that his men, and Don and I and Jane, and the wondering apparitions of the gathered soldiers and New York Police could see him. His moment of triumph! It marked his face with an expression which was utterly Satanic.

Then he dropped his arms for the signal to attack.

CHAPTER XI

The Devastation of New York

That night of May 19th and 20th in New York City will go down in history as the strangest, most terrible ever recorded. The panics caused by the gathering apparitions of the previous days were nearly over now. The city was under martial law, most of it deserted by civilians, save for the dead who still lay strewn on the streets.

Lower and mid-Manhattan were an empty shell of deserted structures, and silent, littered streets, which at night were dark, and through which criminals prowled, braving the unknown terror to fatten upon this opportunity.

Soldiers and police patrolled as best they could all of Manhattan, trying to clear the streets of the crushed and trampled bodies; seeking in the deserted buildings those who might still be there, trapped or ill, or hurt so that they could not escape; protecting property from the criminals who en masse had broken jail and were lurking here.

Warships lay in the harbor and the rivers. The forts on Staten Island and at Sandy Hook were ready with their artillery to attack anything tangible. Airplanes sped back and forth overhead. Troops were marching from outlying points—lines of them coming in over all the bridges.

By midnight of May 19th and 20th there were groups of ghosts visible everywhere about the city. They lurked in the buildings, permeating the solid walls, stalking through them, or down through the foundations; they wandered upon invisible slopes of their own world, climbing up to gather in groups and hanging in mid-air over the city rooftops. In the Hudson River off Grant's Tomb two or three hundred of the apparitions were seemingly encamped at a level below the river's surface. And others were in the air over the waters of the upper bay.

* * * * *

Toward midnight, from the open ocean beyond Sandy Hook spectral vehicles came winging for the city. Rapidly decreasing what had at first seemed a swift flight, they floated like ghostly dirigibles over the bay, heading for Manhattan. The forts fired upon them; airplanes darted at them, through them. But the wraiths came on unheeding. And then, gathering over Manhattan at about Washington

Square, they faded and vanished.

Within thirty minutes, though the vehicles never reappeared, it was seen that the spectral invaders were now tremendously augmented in numbers. A line of shapes marched diagonally beneath the city streets. Patrolling soldiers in the now deserted subways saw them marching past. The group in the air over the harbor was augmented. In Harlem they were very near the street levels, a mass of a thousand or more strung over an area of forty blocks.

In mid-Manhattan soldiers saw that Tiffany's jewelry store housed the lurking shapes. Some were lower, others higher; in this section around Fifth Avenue and Thirty-fourth Street the apparitions were at tremendously diverse levels. There were some perched high in the air more than half way up the gigantic Empire State Building; and still others off to the west were in the air fifteen hundred feet or more above the Pennsylvania Station.

* * * * *

At Tiffany's—as indeed in many other places—the soldiers made close visual contact with the apparitions. A patrolling group of soldiers entered Tiffany's and went to the second floor. They reported a seated group of "ghosts," with numbers of white shapes working near them at a lower level which brought them into Tiffany's basement.

The soldiers thought that what was seated here might be a leader. Apparitions rushed up to him, and away. And here the soldiers saw what seemed the wraiths of two girls, seated quietly together, helmeted and garbed like the men. And men seemed watching them.

By one-thirty there was great activity, constant movement of the apparitions everywhere. Doing what? No one could say. The attack, so closely impending now, was presaged by nothing which could be understood.

There was one soldier who at about one-thirty A.M. was watching the spectres which lurked seemingly in the foundations of Tiffany's. He was called to distant Westchester where the harried Army officials had their temporary headquarters this night. He sped there on his motorcycle and so by chance he was left alive to tell what he had seen. The wraiths under Tiffany's were placing little wedge-shaped ghostly bricks very carefully at different points. It occurred to this soldier that they were putting them in spaces coincidental with the building's foundations.

And then came the attack. The materialization bombs—as we knew them to be—were fired. Progressively over a few minutes, at a thousand different points. The area seemed to be from the Battery to Seventy-second Street. Observers in circling airplanes saw it best—there were few others left alive to tell of it.

* * * * *

The whole thing lasted ten minutes. Perhaps it was not even so long. It began at Washington Square. The little ghostly wedges which had been placed within

the bricks of the arch at the foot of Fifth Avenue began materializing; turning solid. From imponderability they grew tangible; demanded free empty space of their own. Wedged and pushed with solidifying molecules and atoms, each demanding its little space and finding none. Encountering other solidity.

Outraged nature! No two material bodies can occupy the same space at the same time!

The Washington Arch very queerly seemed to burst apart by a strangely silent explosion. The upper portion toppled and fell with a clatter of masonry littering the avenue and park.

Then a house nearby went down; then another. Everything seemed to be crumbling, falling. That was the beginning. Within a minute the chaos spread, running over the city like fire on strewn gasoline. Buildings everywhere came crashing down. The street heaved up, cracking apart in long jagged lines of opening rifts as though an earthquake were splitting them. The subways and tubes and tunnels yawned like black fantastic chasms crossed and littered by broken girders.

The river waters heaved with waves lashed white as the great bridges fell into them; and sucked down and closed again with tumultuous whirlpools where the water had rushed into the cracked tunnels of the river bed.

* * * * *

Of the towering skyscrapers the Woolworth was the first to crumble; it split into sections as it fell across the wreckage which already littered City Hall. Then the Bank of Manhattan Building, crumbling, partly falling sidewise, partly slumping upon the ruins of itself. Simultaneously the Chrysler Building toppled. For a second or two it seemed perilously to sway. Breathless, awesome seconds. It swayed over, lurched back like a great tree in a wind. Then very slowly it swayed again and did not come back. Falling to the east, its whole giant length came down in a great arc. The descent grew faster, until, in one great swoop it crashed upon the wreckage of the Grand Central Station. The roar of it surged over the city. The crash of masonry; the clatter of its myriad windows, the din of its rending, breaking girders.

The giant buildings were everywhere tumbling like falling giants; like Titans stricken by invisible tumors implanted in their vitals. It lasted ten minutes. What infinitude of horror came to proud and lordly Manhattan Island in those momentous ten minutes!

Ten thousand patrolling soldiers and police, bands of lurking criminals, and men, women and children who still had not left the city, went down to death in those ten minutes. Yet no observer could have seen them. Their little bodies, so small amid these Titans of their own creation, went into oblivion unnoticed in the chaos.

* * * * *

The little solidifying bombs of the White Invaders did their work silently. But what a roar surged up into the moonlit night from the stricken city! What tumult of mingled sounds! What a myriad of splintering, reverberating crashes, bursting upward into the night; echoing away, renewed again and again so that it all was a vast pulsing throb of terrible sound. And under it, inaudible, what faint little sounds must have been the agonized screams of the humans who were entombed!

Then the pulse of the great roaring sound began slowing. Soon it became a dying roar. A last building was toppling here and there. The silence of death was spreading over the mangled litter of the strewn city. Dying chaos of sound; but now it was a chaos of color. Up-rolling clouds of plaster dust; and then darker, heavier clouds of smoke. Lurid yellow spots showed through the smoke clouds where everywhere fires were breaking up.

And under it, within it all, the vague white shapes of the enemy apparitions stood untouched, still peering curious, awed triumphant at what they had done.

Another ten minutes passed; then half an hour, perhaps. The apparitions were moving now. The many little groups were gathering into fewer, larger groups. One marched high in the air, with faint lurid green beams slanting down at the ruins of the city; not as weapons this time, but as beams of faint light, seemingly to illuminate the scene, or perhaps as signals to the ghostly army.

The warships in the Hudson were steaming slowly toward the Battery to escape. Searchlights from them, from the other ships hovering impotent in the bay, and from a group of encircling planes, flashed their white beams over the night to mingle with the glare of the fires and the black pall of smoke which was spreading now like a shroud.

* * * * *

There were two young men in a monoplane which had helplessly circled over mid-Manhattan. They saw the city fall, and noticed the lurking wraiths untouched amid the ruins and in the air overhead. And they saw, when it was over, that one great building very strangely had escaped. The Empire State, rearing its tower high into the serene moonlight above the wreckage and the rising layers of smoke, stood unscathed in the very heart of Manhattan. The lone survivor, standing there with the moonlight shining upon its top, and the smoke gathering black around its spreading base.

The two observers in the airplane, stricken with horror at what they had seen, flew mechanically back and forth. Once they passed within a few hundred feet of the standing giant. They saw its two hundred foot mooring mast for dirigibles rising above the eighty-five stories of the main structure. They saw the little observatory room up there in the mooring mast top, with its circular observation platform, a balcony around it. But they did not notice the figures on that balcony.

Then, from the top of the Empire State Building—from the circular observa-

tion platform—a single, horribly intense green light-beam slanted out into the night! A new attack! As though all which had gone before were not enough destruction, now came a new assault. The spectral enemies were tangible now!

* * * * *

The single green light-beam was very narrow. But the moonlight could not fade it; over miles of distance it held visible. It struck first a passing airplane. The two observers in the monoplane were at this time down near the Battery. They saw the giant beam hit the airplane. A moment it clung, and parts of the plane faded. The plane wavered, and then, like a plummet, fell.

The beam swung. It struck a warship lying in the upper bay. Explosions sounded. Puffs of light flared. The ship, with all its passengers vanished and gone, lay gutted and empty.

The source of the light moved rapidly around the circular balcony. The light darted to every distant point of the compass. The surprised distant ships and forts, realizing that here for the first time was a tangible assailant, screamed shots into the night. But the green beam struck the ships and forts and instantly silenced them.

Now the realization of this tangible enemy spread very far. Within a few minutes, planes and radio communication had carried the news. From distant points which the light could not or did not reach, long-range guns were firing at the Empire State. A moment or two only. The base of the building was struck.

Then, frantically, observing planes sent out the warning to stop firing. The green beam had for a minute or two vanished. But now it flashed on again. What was this? The spectral wraiths of ten thousand of the enemy were staring. The observers in the planes stared and gasped. What fantasy! What new weird sight was this, stranger than all that had preceded it!

CHAPTER XII

On the Tower Balcony

Upon the little observatory balcony at the top of the Empire State some twelve hundred feet above the stricken city, Don and I were with Tako as he erected the giant projector. In the midst of the silent shadowy outline of the stricken city falling around us, we had carried the projector up the mountain slope. The spectre of the Empire State Building was presently around us; we were in a hallway of one of the upper stories. Slowly, we materialized with our burden. I recall, as the dark empty corridor of the office building came to solidity around me, with what surprise I heard for the first time the muffled reverberations from the crumbling city....

We climbed the dark and empty stairs, upward into the mooring mast. Don and I toiled with the box, under the weapons of our two guards.

It was only a few minutes while Tako assembled and mounted the weapon. It stood a trifle higher than the parapet top. It rolled freely upon a little carriage mounted with wheels. Don and I peered at it. We hovered close to Tako with only one thought in our minds, Jane's murmured words—if we could learn something about this projector....

* * * * *

Then the horror dulled us. We obeyed orders mechanically, as though all of it were a terrible dream, with only a vague undercurrent of reiterated thought: some chance must come—some fated little chance coming our way.

I recall, during those last terrible minutes when Tako flung the projector beam to send all his distant enemies hurtling into annihilation, that I stood in a daze by the parapet. Don had ceased to look. Tako was rolling the projector from one point to another around the circular balcony. Sometimes he was out of sight on the other side, with the observatory room in the mast hiding him.

We had been ordered not to move. The two guards stood with hand weapons turned on so that the faint green beams slanted downward by their feet, instantly ready, either for Don or me.

And I clung to the balcony rail, staring down at the broken city. It lay strewn and flattened as though, not ten minutes, but ten thousand years of time had crumbled it into ruins.

Then shots from the distant warships began screaming at us. With a grim smile, Tako silenced them. There was a momentary lull.

And then came our chance! Fate, bringing just one unforeseen little thing to link the chain, to turn the undercurrent of existing circumstances—and to give us our chance. Or perhaps Jane, guided by fate, created the opportunity. She does not know. She too was dazed, numb—but there was within her also the memory of what Tolla had almost said. And Tolla's frenzy of jealousy....

* * * * *

Tako appeared from around the balcony, rolling the projector. Its beam was off. He flung a glance of warning at the two guards to watch us. He left the projector, flushed, triumphant, all his senses perhaps reeling with the realization of what he had done. He saw the two girls huddled in the moonlight of the balcony floor. He stooped and pushed Tolla roughly away.

"Jane! Jane, did you see it? My triumph! Tako, master of everything! Even of you—is it not so?"

Did some instinct impel her not to repulse him? Some intuition giving her strength to flash him a single alluring moonlit glance?

But suddenly he had enwrapped her in his arms. Kissing her, murmuring love and lust....

This was our chance. But we did not know it then. A very chaos of diverse action so suddenly was precipitated upon this balcony!

Don and I cried out and heedlessly leaped forward. The tiny beams of the guards swung up. But they did not reach us, for the guards themselves were stricken into horror. The shot from a far-distant warship screamed past. But that went almost unheeded. Tako had shouted, and the guards impulsively turned so that their beams missed Don and me.

Tolla had flung herself upon Tako and Jane. Screaming, she tore at them and all in an instant rose to her feet. Tako's cylinder, which she had snatched, was in her hand. She flashed it on as Don and I reached her.

* * * * *

The guards for that instant could not fire for we were all intermingled. Don stumbled in his rush and fell upon Tako and Jane, and in a moment rose as the giant Tako lifted him and tried to cast him off.

My rush flung me against Tolla. She was babbling, mouthing frenzied laughs of hysteria. Her beam pointed downward, but as she reeled from the impact of my rush, the beam swung up; missed me, narrowly missed the swaying bodies of Tako and Don, and struck one of the guards who was standing, undecided what to do. It clung to him for a second or two, and then swung to the other guard.

The guards in a puff of spectral light were gone. Tolla stood wavering; then swung her light toward Tako and Don. But I was upon her.

"Tolla! Good God—"

"Get back from me! Back, I tell you."

I heard Jane's agonized warning from the floor. "Bob!"

Tolla's light missed my shoulder. Tako had cast Don off and stood alone as he turned toward us. Then Tolla's light-beam swung on him. I heard her eery maddened laugh as it struck him.

A wraith of Tako was there, stricken as though numbed by surprise.... Then nothingness....

Shots from the distant warships were screaming around us. One struck the base of the building.

I clung to my scattering senses. I gripped Tolla.

"That projector—what was it you almost told Jane?"

* * * * *

She stood stupidly babbling. "Told Jane? That projector—"

She laughed wildly, and like a tigress, cast me off. "Fools of men! Tako—the fool!"

She swung into a frenzy of her own language. And then back into English. "I will show you—Tako, the fool! All those fools out there under the ground and in

the sky. I will show them!"

She stooped over the projector and fumbled with the mechanism.

Don gasped, "Those apparitions—is that what you're going to attack?"

"Yes—attack them!"

The beam flashed on. But it was a different beam now. Fainter, more tenuous; the hum from it was different.

It leaped into the ground. It was a spreading beam this time. It bathed the white apparitions who were peering up at the city.

Why, what was this? Weird, fantastic sight! There was a moment of Tolla's frenzied madness; then she staggered away from the projector. But Don and I had caught the secret. We took her place. We carried it on.

We were hardly aware that the far-off warships had ceased firing. We hardly realized that Tolla had rushed for the parapet; climbed, screaming and laughing—and that Jane tried to stop her.

"Oh, Tolla, don't—"

But Tolla toppled and fell.... Her body was almost not recognized when it was later found down in the ruins.

Don and I flung this new beam into the night. We rolled the projector around the platform, hurling the beam in every direction at the white apparitions....

* * * * *

It had caught first that group which lurked in the ground near the base of the Empire State. Tolla had turned the beam to the reverse co-ordinates from those Tako used. It penetrated into the borderland, reached the apparitions and forcibly materialized them! A second or two it clung to that group of white men's shapes in the ground. They grew solid; ponderable. But the space they now claimed was not empty! Solid rock was here, yielding no space to anything! Like the little materialization bombs, this was nature outraged. The ground and the solid rock heaved up, broken and torn, invisibly permeated and strewn with the infinitesimal atomic particles of what a moment before had been the bodies of living men.

We caught with the beam that marching line of apparitions beneath the ground surface—a section of Tako's army which was advancing upon Westchester. The city streets over them surged upward. And some we caught under the rivers and within the waters of the bay, and the waters heaved and lashed into turmoil.

Then we turned the beam into the air. The apparitions lost contact with their invisible mountain peaks. And with sudden solidity, the gravity of our world pulled at them. They fell. Solid men's bodies, falling with the moonlight on them. Dark blobs turning end over end; plunging into the rivers and the harbor with little splashes of white to mark their fall; and yet others whirling down, crashing into the wreckage of masonry, into the pall of smoke and the lurid yellow flames of the

burning city.

The attack of the White Invaders was over.

* * * * *

A year has passed. There has been no further menace; perhaps there never will be. And again, the invisible realm of which Don, Jane and I were vouchsafed so strange a glimpse, lies across a void impenetrable. Earth scientists have the projector, with its current batteries apparently almost exhausted. And they have the transition mechanism which we three were wearing. But of those, the vital element had been removed by Tako—and was gone with him. Many others were found on the bodies, and upon the body of poor Tolla. But all were wrecked by their fall.

Perhaps it is just as well. Yet, often I ponder on that other realm. What strange customs and science and civilization I glimpsed.

Out of such thoughts one always looms upon me: a contemplation of the vastness of things to be known.

And the kindred thought: what a very small part of it we really understand!